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The Washington Monthly

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The Right-Winger to Watch

Reviews by Jonathan Alter, Eleanor Clift, Matthew Cooper, and Mickey Kaus

It's Not As Bad As It Looks:

How The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the Independent Counsel Law Screwed Bruce Babbitt

by Robert Worth

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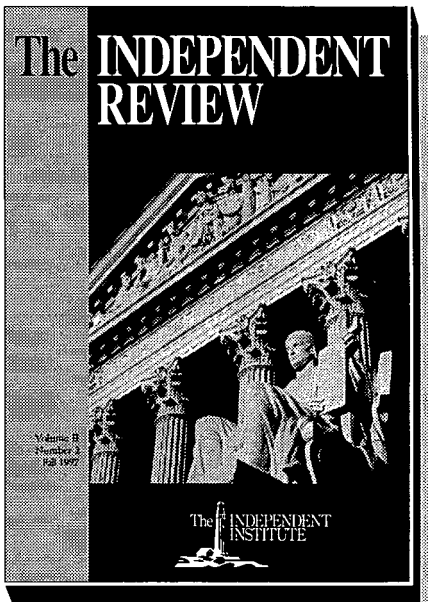

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Letters

Encore!

Congratulations to Hedrick Smith on personally evaluating the impact of NAFTA on rank-and-file workers in Mexico and the U.S. ("A Fast-Track Reality Check," Jan./Feb. 1998)! I hope he will elaborate in future articles on what is happening in Mexico's rural areas as well — the largest migration in this century is occurring without much of a peep from those who should care. His article is one of the few I have read that tells the story.

REP. MARCY KAPTUR
D-Ohio

It's a Sin

There is nothing so sad as the statistic quoted in Jonathan Dube's article ("After the Abortion," March 1998) stating that 1.4 million abortions are committed each year. Why the psychobabble about a compassionate embrace of the whole woman in the entirety of the trauma? A woman has allowed the murder of her baby, but Planned Parenthood feels that all the mother needs is permission from a pro-choicer to grieve. That is ridiculous. Planned Parenthood has done the woman grievous harm. At least let someone else help her recover.

God forgives not the pro-choice movement.

LAUREEN GONIWICHA
via e-mail

Timber Crimes

Three cheers for Sen. Dale Bumpers' critique of the outdated Mining Law of 1872 ("Capitol Hill's Longest-Running Outrage," Jan./Feb. 1998) and for the dart thrown by Charles Peters ("Tilting at Windmills") at money-losing timber sales in the national forests. Both practices are indeed antiquated rip-offs of taxpayers that benefit big mining and timber interests at the expense of the public interest.

Unfortunately, the fiscal and environmental damage done by the U.S. Forest Service's logging program is even worse than you indicated. The Wilderness Society, using the Forest Service's own figures but including logging-related costs that it ignores, found that the agency's "commercial, stewardship, and personal use" logging programs actually lost $458 million — not $14.7 million — in fiscal 1996. Significantly, the commercial logging program, which is supposed to make money, lost $204 million. The national forest roadbuilding program that supports these commercial logging sales also causes damaging mudslides and pollution of drinking water.

The Forest Service announced on Jan. 22 its intention to halt roadbuilding in many national forests, but to leave 15 million acres of national forest lands in Alaska, California, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado unprotected. We believe it is time to end the outrageous timber industry roadbuilding subsidy and to protect all remaining roadless areas in the national forests.

WILLIAM H. MEADOWS
PRESIDENT
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY
Washington, DC

Race, Not Class

In his screed against affirmative action ("Beyond Racial Preferences," March 1998), Robert Worth recycles arguments as old as the first attempts to challenge white preferences: Insisting on equality makes white people mad!

That was the argument made against integrating buses in Montgomery in 1955. "If we give in to the Negroes, they would go around boasting of a victory they had won over white people," a bus company official said.

Similarly, Worth condemns affirmative action for not solving black poverty. It isn't a poverty program, and ought not be blamed for failing to solve problems it was not designed to solve. No one beat Rodney King because he was poor.

Affirmative action is a series of programs designed to conquer white supremacist attitudes in university admissions, hiring, and promotions — attitudes that affect Bill Cosby's children as well as the child of a welfare mother.

Finally, Worth resurrects the old charge that affirmative action creates a stigma in its beneficiaries. White suspicion of black capability predates affirmative action by centuries. Odd there is no stigma attached to the thousands of whites who got into col-

The *Monthly* is seeking applicants for an editor/reporter position that will be available in August. A sense of humor and the willingness to work long hours for low pay are required. Candidates should send a cover letter, resumé, and writing samples (not necessarily published, but showing fact-gathering and analytic ability) to:

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lege as legacies because Dad was an alumnus, or those who got jobs because Dad was president of the company. You never see them walking around with heads held low, moaning that they've lost their self-esteem because everyone in the executive washroom is whispering about how they got their jobs.

JULIAN BOND
CHAIRMAN, NAACP
NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Washington, DC

Robert Worth replies:

Julian Bond is quite right about the injustice of the legacy preference, and we have argued the same point (See "Why Are Droves of Unqualified, Unprepared Kids Getting into Our Top Colleges?" in the June 1991 issue). But that doesn't change the fact that minority preferences have proved just as divisive and stigmatizing as Martin Luther King Jr. said they would. King opposed them not because they "made white people mad," but because he believed a broadly class-based approach would serve justice better.

Double Standard

Concerning your criticism of the government's overly generous pension plans ("Tilting at Windmills," March 1998), I doubt that you can name one company that cuts pensions because both spouses worked for that company. The inclusion of the survivorship pension as somehow excessive is beyond the pale. You'd be hot after any company that tried such a stunt.

And your comments about the type of car Betty Currie's husband, a government retiree, can afford could have used reporting rather than assumption. For all you know, he inherited money or even saved more out of his pay.

FRED GUF
Concord, NH

Charles Peters replies:

The point of the item in question was that when all factors, including spousal benefits, are considered, government pensions are, as The Washington Post*'s Mike Causey recently pointed out, "better than any staff retirement in the private sector." To illustrate, we cited the various pension incomes that will be received this year by retired Congressman Hastings Keith: $6,682 a month for his civil service pension, $1,546 for his military service, $1,324 for Social Security, and $871 a month in widower's annuity for his wife's service in the CIA — for a grand total of $125,976 a year.*

As to the financing of Mr. Currie's Mercedes, the writer is of course correct in noting that there may be other explanations.

Hot Air

There must be something in the Washington air that makes news media types play fast and loose with words concerning allegations against President Clinton.

Charles Peters, for example, in his last column wrote that he was troubled "by the way [Clinton] *seems* to be hitting on women who work for him." Then he states that he "*suspect[s]* that this has less to do with his power over them than with the fact that they happen to be around." That is pure speculation not based on facts! He also quotes Molly Ivins who says she doesn't care "who he's screwing, as long as it's not the public." Again, an effort to be cute by Molly without any factual basis!

Later in the column Mr. Peters wonders what an impeachment trial of Clinton would be like and refers to hypothetical questions like "And what happened after he unzipped his zipper?" That kind of writing belongs in the tabloids at the supermarket!

Yes, there must be something in the Washington air.

DONALD E. SMITH
Sun City West, AZ

Charles Peters replies:

The Monthly *has often been accused of being too soft on Clinton, so we're pleased to see that there are readers who disagree. Those who want to see the world in terms of clear blacks and whites will not find comfort in the* Monthly. *We don't want the president impeached, and we don't want him to have to go through a trial in the Paula Jones case, but we have to be candid about our strong suspicion that, as to his telling the truth in regards to his personal affairs, the president will rank among the leading minimalists of the late 20th century.*

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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

The Return of the House Call • Foot Fetishes • FDR's Affairs • Black and White Justice • The Case of the Missing Convertible

SOMETIMES LAWYERS DO GOOD. I make the concession grudgingly, of course, but here's a case that demands it. You will recall the West Virginia couple whose daughter was killed by a car being pursued by state police at speeds exceeding 100 miles per hour. It appears possible that the high speed may have been at least partially motivated by the fact that the police were being filmed by a television crew from "Real Stories of the Highway Patrol."

The state legislature reacted by increasing the penalties for drivers who flee the police. The couple's lawyer correctly divined that there were other guilty parties and sued both the state police and the television show, which is now owned by Rupert Murdoch's Fox News. The state police have settled the claim for $775,000, according to the *Charleston Gazette*. The suit against the TV company is expected to go to trial in October. I hope the lawyer and his clients clean up.

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TO PUT BILL CLINTON'S SINS IN perspective, it helps me to think of the leader I most admire. FDR is my great hero. I'm even a member of the committee that seeks to have him and Abraham Lincoln honored along with George Washington on President's Day. I'm also an admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt. But I have to concede that had they lived in the 1990s, the media would have had a field day with their sex lives. Their efforts to fight the Depression and win World War II would have been obscured by speculation about their friends who may have been more than friends, several of whom actually lived in the White House. During the '30s, Mrs. Roosevelt's intimate friend Lorena Hickok resided on the second floor, the president's secretary and close associate Marguerite LeHand on the third. During the war Mrs. Roosevelt had several close female friends living with her in the Val-Kill cottage on the Hyde Park estate. The president had Princess Martha of Norway as his long-term guest on the White House's second floor. And FDR's daughter Anna acted as an arranger of his reunions with his old girlfriend, Lucy Mercer Rutherford, when Mrs. Roosevelt was not in Washington.

If you've ever been an advance man, you have to feel sorry for the hapless fellow who arranged that disastrous meeting at Ohio State.

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A FASCINATING story about the failure of a notable experiment in worker democracy recently appeared in the Business section of *The New York Times*. Called the Bolivar Project, it was an effort, in the words of the *Times*' Barnaby J. Feder, "to tear down the adversarial walls between workers and management" at Harman Automotive Inc., in Bolivar, Tenn. It enjoyed enough success in reducing the automatic hostility between union and company to be widely imitated. What then was the failure? Workers were given too much control over setting their hours. The less they worked, the less they felt obligated to work, so that "a shortened workday came to be viewed as an entitlement." Soon the company was attracting the kind of job applicants whose first question when they got the post was not "which machine should I run?" but "when can I go home?"

This is similar to a problem I've seen in the federal civil service. Tenure, generous pensions, and excellent health insurance (see Eric Schnurer's article on page 20) attracted too many people who were more concerned with security and benefits than with doing a job.

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JOE CALIFANO, THE former secretary of health, education, and welfare who is now president of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, has a good idea: Give treatment to prisoners who are drug or alcohol addicts or abusers. They number 1.2 million. If they were given treatment, many would relapse, but even if the treatment succeeded in turning only 10 percent into sober working citizens, the treatment would nevertheless pay for itself, making an estimated $8.2 billion in benefits at a cost of $7.8 billion.

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THE NEW SPACE STATION IS now $3.6 billion over budget, according to a recent report in the *Los Angeles Times*. So NASA is

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searching for some favorable publicity. Not only is John Glenn going to be sent into orbit, so is a third grade teacher from McCall, Idaho. You will recall what happened to another teacher, Christa McAuliffe, when she got launched in another NASA PR stunt. What are the chances that Barbara Morgan, the teacher from Idaho, will meet the same fate?

According to another story, this one in *The New York Times*, the risk of catastrophe during a shuttle flight is now 1 in 145. This is better than the 1 in 50 it used to be. But it's a long, long way from the 1 in 2 million risk of a flight on a commercial jet. So why put another teacher's life in jeopardy ?

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LIKE MOST PEOPLE, I BELIEVE A little more than an occasional public hug went on between Bill and Monica, but I am amazed at what little interest the press has in evidence to the contrary, evidence that tends to show that the relationship was innocent.

Take the *Chicago Tribune* story by Roger Simon that had the quote from Mike McCurry: "Maybe there'll be a simple, innocent explanation. I don't think so, because I think we would have offered that up already." You've probably read that a hundred times by now. But have you read anywhere that in the same interview McCurry also said: "This is the White House at the end of the 20th century. Not only a fish bowl, but the klieg lights are on all the time. There is no zone of privacy."

McCurry went on to explain — an explanation that as far as we can determine only the *Tribune* printed — "that he and other aides have access to the pantry in the Oval Office where Clinton is alleged, in one account, to have groped a female aide. McCurry goes there frequently to get coffee, he said, and suggested that such traffic makes it unlikely Clinton would have sex in the Oval Office. 'Because there is no privacy,' McCurry said. 'There is no way to do it if you wanted to.'"

You may still believe, as I do, that the president found a way, but it's a telling comment on the press that it was so uninterested in his possible innocence that it failed to tell the public about the exculpatory parts of the *Tribune* story. Later in the interview McCurry expressed a feeling I share when he said: "I think what was shocking to me was the palpable excitement in the reporters the minute they thought he was going down. They thought they were going to run this guy out of office and they got excited, thrilled by it."

As you watched the press corps play Grand Inquisitor with McCurry, assaulting him with an unrelenting barrage of heavy, hardball questions about a matter totally unrelated to the governance of the country, you also had to wonder at their lost sense of proportion. For me that is the most dismaying part of this sorry episode.

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I BELIEVED GENNIFER FLOWERS way back in 1992. That's why I have not shared the rest of the media's apparent conviction that additional evidence of Clinton's horniness and of his lying about it was shocking and therefore big news. For me there was no big story until Kathleen Willey's appearance on "60 Minutes." Assuming her story is true — that she does not go down in history as "call anytime Kathleen" — what I found new and surprising was not Clinton's sexual conduct in itself, but the lack of empathy it revealed. The president's capacity for empathy has been for me a redeeming quality, something that I have admired, but one has to ask: If he truly felt Kathleen Willey's pain, how could he feel her breast?

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NOW FOR SOME GOOD NEWS. "The house call is staging a comeback," reports Knight-Ridder's Marian Uhlman. When I was a boy, the doctor always came to see you when you were sick. I welcomed the visits because they were usually a reliable indicator that I wouldn't have to go to school that day, and often even the next. But the practice died out in the 1950s. Most of the time since then I haven't minded going to the doctor's offices. But there have been a few times when I was really sick and the prospect of getting myself to the doctor's office was frightening. Now it appears that the tide is turning, not all the way back to the days when the doctor came whenever you wanted, but maybe to the point where he'll come when you really need him.

Medical schools are beefing up their home-care curricula, writes Uhlman. Medicare is raising the amount it pays doctors for house calls. And a national group of home-care doctors that started out with just five members 10 years ago now numbers more than 1,000.

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SPEAKING OF DISPROPORTION, HOW about the Maryland judge who sentenced Alan Lee Hill to eight years in prison for allowing his girlfriend to tie up and torture his young son? The same judge had given the girlfriend a sentence of 18 months, even though the abuse was her idea and it was she who performed it, including force-feeding the child hot pepper that damaged his liver. It appears the reason the second sentence was too tough was because the judge had been criticized for making the first one too light. So he compounded one mistake by making another.

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ON FRIDAY, FEB. 27, PRESIDENT Clinton released letters he had written to the Federal Election Commission urging it to prohibit soft money, and to the Federal Communications Commission asking it to require free or reduced cost air time for candidates. The next day, *The Washington Post* found the letters worthy of eight paragraphs on page A14. *The New York Times* gave the story even less attention, five paragraphs on the

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bottom of page A7.

This was the week the McCain-Feingold campaign reform bill was killed in the Senate by Trent Lott (R-Miss.). Another way to achieve reform is through action by the commissions. A story delving into the importance of the reforms — very great — and the power of the agencies to make them — they have it — and the possibility that they will actually make the reforms (more likely at the FCC than the FEC) would have been interesting to anyone who cares about our campaign policies. It's a comment on the degree to which our great papers have taken leave of their senses that they devoted much less space to this story than to whether presidential semen might be found on Monica Lewinsky's dress.

You will recall what happened to another teacher, Christa McAuliffe, when she got launched in another NASA PR stunt.

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AND SPEAKING OF light punishment, you may recall the California man who was paroled after serving only 10 years for raping a woman and then chopping off both her hands. Recently he was found guilty of stabbing another woman to death. This explains why mandatry sentences for violent crimes make more sense than most of my fellow liberals admit.

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INEPTITUDE IN THE DISTRICT of Columbia government is not just a problem at the managerial level. As I keep trying to explain, the rank and file has its shortcomings as well. The Case of the Missing Convertible provides the most recent example. Jeannie Whitt was driving her Chrysler LeBaron convertible near the waterfront in southwest Washington. She was not wearing a seat belt. Unfortunately her unbeltedness was observed by two police officers who proceeded to stop her car and ask for her registration. She didn't have it. What's more, the license plates bore an expired date.

At this point the officers were properly suspicious. But then, instead of making phone calls to verify Whitt's claim that the car had been registered in her stepfather's name, which was the case, and ticketing her for the various infractions, the officers seized the car and told her they were taking it to the city's impoundment lot, leaving her on the street. They drove the car to the lot. But it was closed. Their solution: leave the convertible on the street too — with the keys in the ignition. "This," comments *The Washington Post*'s Maria Elena Fernandez, "in a city where 9,600 cars were stolen last year." During the night, the figure became 9,601.

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FEDERAL OFFICES ARE BECOMING more spacious as a result of downsizing, *The Washington Post*'s Mike Causey recently observed in his Federal Diary column. Which makes me curious about how much money could be saved by leasing or selling the office space that is no longer needed. Since more than 10 percent of the employees are gone, it seems reasonable to assume that at least 10 percent of the government's real estate empire could be disposed of, and that should bring in enough money to fund a needed program or two.

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ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN HIRED by the federal government knows that there's a long wait between the job offer and the time you actually go to work. This, you are told, is because of the extensive background check that is required to keep out spies and other undesirables. *The Weekly Standard*'s Tucker Carlson was understandably curious about why the State Department's lengthy investigation failed to find out that Larry Lawrence had not served in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II, as he had claimed. That service, you will recall, was what qualified the former ambassador for burial at Arlington. Carlson decided to see what he could learn by making just one phone call to the American Merchant Marine Veterans Association, which had been listed on Lawrence's resume. The association had no record of Lawrence. Carlson's suspicion that government investigators had been less than diligent in their inquiry was also confirmed by *The San Diego Union-Tribune* which sent two reporters out to check on Lawrence's reputation. "The reporters returned a few hours later with more derogatory information about Larry Lawrence than State Department sleuths had managed to gather in a few months," writes Carlson. The senior vice president of Lawrence's Hotel Del Coronado said "I wouldn't take his word for anything."

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IF YOU HAVE DEALT WITH MEMbers of the United States Foreign Service, you have probably been impressed by their intelligence and maddened by their bureaucratic indifference to the problems of the average American who seeks their assistance. An example of the indifference was provided by a recent op-ed piece in *The New York Times*, titled "My Guatemalan Nightmare." Written by Carolyn Frazier, it describes how, when her sister had been shot in the throat by gunmen in rural Guatemala and her father asked for help from the American embassy, he was given a list of hospital phone numbers "passed impersonally from behind a protective glass window." On his own, the father arranged to have

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the daughter transported to Guatemala City and hospitalized. "Although the hospital was less than 10 minutes away from the embassy, we still heard nothing from embassy officials."

Now comes the most telling part of the story. "It was only two days later, after a friend of a friend in Sen. Edward Kennedy's office called the embassy to inquire about my sister's condition, that we received a phone call." What, one wonders, would the embassy have done if someone hadn't known a senator?

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DID YOU KNOW THAT THE Israelis hold Lebanese citizens in prison, not because they have committed crimes, but so that they can serve as hostages? Not only that but, according to Serge Schmemann of *The New York Times*, the practice has been condoned by a three-judge panel of the Israeli Supreme Court. Thank goodness they have yet to shoot a hostage. But the Israelis are becoming disturbingly similar to their former oppressors.

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SAN FRANCISCO'S MAYOR, WILLIE Brown, sees himself as a world statesman. He has recently traveled to the Philippines and Vietnam and has assigned space in the renovated City Hall that is desperately needed for regular city functions to an expanded office of protocol. But he's doing one thing right. Last month Brown decided to make a personal test of the municipal transit system. He boarded a city bus for a trip scheduled to take 12 minutes. It took 32. The result is that the mayor is now busy preparing laws designed to unsnarl the traffic that impeded his bus. You can't help thinking that public service would undergo dramatic improvements if more of the big shots would do what Willie Brown did. I can't wait to hear about Marion Barry standing in line to get his driver's license renewed. But he's even more committed to his diplomatic duties than Brown. After visiting four countries in Asia and Africa last year, he's going to Israel this month.

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IT'S NOT HARD TO SEE WHY African-Americans sometimes get a bit testy with the rest of us. They have to endure suspicious clerks when they go shopping and are ignored by the cab drivers they try to hail for the trip home. And of course they are usually treated worse than the rest of us when being arrested. The latest example comes from Milwaukee, where the police conducted a sting operation by placing a $200 boom box in the back seat of a 1987 Oldsmobile which they proceeded to watch. Donald Henderson, a black man, stole the box. So did William Huntington, a white. Prosecutors recommended a sentence of 15 days for Huntington, and one year for Henderson.

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TWO MEMBERS OF the New York literati — James Atlas of *The New Yorker* and David Halberstam in *House and Garden* — have recently lamented the impact on their lives of the Wall Street super-rich. But what is most revealing about the articles is how well the writers are living. Both have summer homes — Atlas in Vermont, Halberstam in Nantucket — as well as apartments in New York. Although Atlas laments "one of our children has to sleep in the maid's room," he is able to send them to private school and pay a cello teacher to come to his house every Friday. Halberstam's problem with the super-rich is that they have stolen his gardener. But after all, she was always fighting with his fishpond man, further evidence of how tough life can be on Nantucket.

During the '30s, Mrs. Roosevelt's intimate friend Lorena Hickok resided on the second floor, the president's secretary and close associate Marguerite LeHand on the third.

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THERE IS NEW EVIDENCE TO support another fear of mine: that the federal downsizing of recent years may not have been as selective as I had hoped in terms of getting rid of people who really weren't needed and keeping or even adding the ones who are needed. The government now employs fewer nurses and engineers, people who do real work, and more who function under the suspiciously vague label "miscellaneous administration and program management."

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SEVERAL YEARS AGO I HAPPENED to hear Sir John Templeton, the mutual fund sage, explain that stocks would continue to rise in price because there wasn't enough stock to satisfy the demand. Since then I have heard this explanation offered many times, most recently in Brendan Boyd's "Investor's Notebook" column, which adds, "leveraged buyouts and mergers have further reduced supply. And corporations have been repurchasing their own shares in record numbers. As long as this supply shortfall persists, prices could continue higher." This makes me nervous. Doesn't it mean that stock prices are based not on intrinsic value but on the psychology of demand?

Wasn't the argument that Japanese real estate would keep climbing in value based on the same short-supply theory? Only it didn't work out that way, did it?

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BACK TO THE JOURNALISTIC

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madness inspired by the Clinton-Lewinsky story, 41 percent of what purported to be news reporting during the first week of the scandal actually consisted not of fact but of "analysis, opinion, and speculation," according to a study sponsored by the Committee of Concerned Journalists. And we're not talking about the *National Enquirer* but the likes of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN.

I wish the study had included a determination of the amount of space that was wasted on attempts at colorful writing such as John Broder's news story in *The New York Times* on Sidney Blumenthal's grand jury testimony in response to Ken Starr's subpoena:

"After a long career as a scribbler in the shadows, Sidney Blumenthal got his moment in the sun today.... Mr. Blumenthal faced the camera at the peak of the Western Hemisphere's last solar eclipse of the millennium."

Broder and his editors deemed this material worthy of the front-page space they were unable to find for the story about the president's letters to the FEC and the FCC.

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IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN AN advance man, you have to feel sorry for the hapless fellow who arranged that disastrous town meeting at Ohio State. Big shots are not happy when things go wrong and you are almost certain to bear the brunt of their anger. The blame stops with you and stays there. And disaster can be cruelly unexpected.

I remember one visit that John Kennedy made to Charleston, West Virginia. I had carefully arranged to have crowds on hand to meet him at the airport and at the hotel where he was staying. In between, I counted on the high school band that marched before Kennedy's car to attract crowds as we proceeded through the downtown area.

Kennedy got off his plane and saw the large crowd. He thanked me and said he'd been told that "You were responsible for all the arrangements." I smiled self-deprecatingly, but actually of course feeling pretty good about myself. That began to change as we proceeded through downtown. There was no crowd, nothing more than the ordinary pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk, which if anything seemed less than usual. As the blocks went by, the situation did not improve. I slumped in the front seat, hoping the senator would just forget my existence instead of throttling me, which seemed quite a bit more likely. Then we made the last turn into the block that led to the hotel. Arrayed before us was a great mob — cheering, waving Kennedy placards, reaching out to touch Kennedy. As we got out of the car, I said, "Of course, you know I planned it this way." Of course, he knew I hadn't, but he grinned. And at least that time I dodged the bullet — which I fear will not be the case with the State Department official responsible for Ohio State. He's probably already on his way to Outer Mongolia to take up his duties as second secretary

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EVER HOPEFUL OF FINDING NEW ways to entice readers to subscribe to *The Washington Monthly*, I always try to read the direct mail solicitations from other magazines. One approach that I certainly wouldn't have thought of was made in a letter my wife received from *Vogue* the other day. "Dear Friend," it began, "Do you need more shoes? Of course you do. Shoes make you happy. That's why *Vogue* reports on shoes like nobody else. Sexy and oh-so-high heels. Strappy sandals. Friendly flats. Thigh-high boots. Essential pumps. Amusing mules. Where else are you going to find a magazine with such a fetish about your feet?"

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The Right-Winger to Watch

Gary Bauer is smart, savvy, not afraid to rock the Republican boat — and a possible presidential candidate

BY MICHELLE COTTLE

SLAP A FLOPPY HAT AND A PAIR OF oversized sunglasses on Gary Bauer and he would be the spitting image of the late Truman Capote: Standing just over five-feet tall, Bauer has a broad, round, vaguely cherubic face; a high forehead; heavy eyelids; a fair complexion; and something vaguely prim about the mouth. Squint a little, and you can almost picture him in 1970s New York partying with Andy Warhol and Paloma Picasso at Studio 54.

But a physical resemblance is as far as the parallels go. A former Reagan White House official and the current head of the ultra-conservative Family Research Council, Bauer is about as far from Capote on the political and social spectrum as Jesse Helms is from Gianni Versace. A vocal advocate of "pro-family" policies on issues ranging from child care to taxes, Bauer is the quintessential social conservative. He opposes abortion, gun control, gay rights, no-fault divorce, women in military combat, bilingual education, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He supports school choice, school prayer, abstinence-only sex ed, the death penalty, an increase in the per-child tax credit, tougher obscenity laws, and tax breaks for stay-at-home spouses. Though a long-time Republican, Bauer shares none of his party colleagues' current obsession with cultivating a "big-tent" image for the GOP. He is an unapologetic ideologue, as one might surmise from the Family Research Council's (FRC) stated mission: "to reaffirm and promote nationally, and particularly in Washington, D.C., the traditional family unit and the Judeo-Christian value system upon which it is built."

But Gary Bauer is no run-of-the-mill right-winger. Unlike many conservative Republicans, this pro-family crusader does not engage in knee-jerk government bashing. (In fact, he and close chum William Kristol, editor and publisher of *The Weekly Standard*, are derided as "big-government conservatives" by some of their colleagues on the right.) Although he shares many of the GOP's ideas about keeping government hands off the American family, Bauer recognizes that Uncle Sam can at times be useful in advancing a conservative social agenda. As a result, over the past year or so Bauer and FRC have been generating waves in Washington with their decidedly un-Republican opposition to policy proposals such as Social Security privatization, the flat tax, and free trade with China. Moreover, in gathering support for his causes, Bauer has proved willing to cross party lines and enlist a number of unconventional allies — from House minority leader Dick Gephardt to liberal matriarch Ethel Kennedy to the AFL-CIO. His willingness to form such coalitions has drawn the attention of the mainstream media — "It's sort of a man bites dog sort of story," explains Bauer — helping to make the FRC chief a regular on the pundit circuit. In recent months Bauer has squared off on-air against opponents as diverse as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the president of the Motion Picture Association, Jack Valenti.

Bauer's outspokenness has also upped his profile on the Hill. In addition to tweaking Reps. Armey and Gingrich over their economic priorities, Bauer has not been shy about dressing down the GOP for abandoning the social conservatives who helped sweep it into the majority in '94. All too often, laments Bauer, Republican candidates sound defensive and apologetic when addressing the nation's "virtue deficit." During the past two presidential campaigns, he notes, "the American public never heard the social conservatives' world view at all."

To Republicans' discomfort, Bauer's criticism reflects a growing discontent among the party's religious and social conservatives (nearly half a million of

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whom, incidentally, are members of FRC). "There is tremendous concern among the pro-moral community that all of the promises that were made in the inspirational speeches that Republicans gave in 1994 just sort of went away," says James Dobson, the conservative Christian radio host and president of the 2.2 million-member Focus on the Family. "Now, Christian voters feel betrayed and abandoned." Spurred by this dissatisfaction with electoral politics, Bauer has taken matters into his own hands. In late 1996, he put together a political action committee, called the Campaign for Working Families (CWF), aimed at supporting candidates who promote pro-life, pro-family values. The PAC's fund-raising success — a whopping $2.6 million in 1997 — has turned more than a few heads inside the Beltway. (Nothing gets Washington's attention quite like the ability to raise money.)

Of course, combine a flair for fund-raising with a significant media presence and what do you get? A potential presidential candidate. And sure enough, Bauer is making noises about a run for the White House in 2000 — noises that have not been especially well received by other presidential wannabes courting the social-conservative vote. For people like former Vice President Dan Quayle and Sen. John Ashcroft, Bauer could pose a real threat in the primaries. In addition to his sizable FRC constituency, he has close ties to numerous other social-conservative groups, including the Republican National Coalition for Life and FRC's former parent organization, Dobson's Focus on the Family. What's more, although the money Bauer's PAC is pulling in can't be transferred to a presidential campaign, its list of generous contributors would certainly come in handy for candidate Bauer.

Even should Bauer opt not to run this time around, Republicans and Democrats alike would do well to keep close tabs on him. With the once-formidable Christian Coalition undergoing a major identity (and funding) crisis, Bauer and FRC are well-positioned to become the new spokesmen for die-hard social conservatives. And all those disgruntled pro-family folks pouring money into FRC and the Campaign for Working Families could go a long way toward shaping future congressional and presidential elections — whether Gary Bauer is actually in the race or simply calling the plays from the sidelines.

True Believer

The December 22 cover story of Bauer-pal Bill Kristol's *Weekly Standard* says it all. There, in all his cartoon glory, is a caricature of Gary Bauer sporting royal blue tights, a red cape, and a giant "S" on his puffed-out chest. The accompanying cover line reads, "Bauer Power: Gary Bauer, Washington's Most Formidable Conservative."

The magazine's message, though perhaps a bit over-the-top, nonetheless speaks to Bauer's relatively recent arrival as a major political player in D.C. It's not that Bauer is a newcomer to national politics. A veteran of the Reagan administration, he served in the upper echelons of both the Education Department and the White House. But even back then, many of the Gipper's advisers considered Bauer decidedly *un*savvy, a little too fixated on moral issues to be a real player. This was particularly true during Reagan's second term, recalls American Enterprise Institute scholar Dinesh D'Souza, an aide to Bauer during his stint as domestic policy adviser. "Gary was seen as this nerdy little fellow who kept talking about divisive social issues — quixotic, extreme, dogmatic," says D'Souza. Even after the Iran-Contra scandal broke and the policy at the White House became "do nothing, keep your head down, and ride out the second term," Bauer refused to stop pushing on social issues. As a result, says D'Souza, he was ostracized by much of the staff.

But Bauer's unwillingness to back away from his social agenda caught the eye of Focus on the Family's James Dobson. Dobson had dealt with Bauer at both the Education Department and the White House and was impressed with "the depth of Bauer's commitment" to conservative values. "I saw him at the White House during the latter years of the administration when many conservatives had been purged or voluntarily left," says Dobson. "I knew there was a great deal of pressure on Gary, and yet he did not compromise on what he believed." In 1988, at Dobson's request, Bauer left the administration to take the reins at the Family Research Council, at that time a direct branch of Focus on the Family.

It was at the helm of FRC, Bauer's colleagues say, that he discovered his true talent: coalition building. His work gathering like-minded pro-family conservatives into a political force has been "extraordinary," says D'Souza. "He's taken an organization that essentially had no Washington roots and turned it into a powerhouse rivaling, if not surpassing, the Christian Coalition." Indeed, the growth of the Family Research Council over the last decade is a greater testament to Bauer's networking skill than any of the odd alliances he made during his China crusade. Since 1988 when Bauer took over as director, FRC has gone from a $200,000 organization with 3,000 constituents to a $14 million institution with a constituency of more than 450,000. "Gary is one of the best networkers in Wash-

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ington," says House Majority Leader Dick Armey, who, despite their occasional economic differences, has worked with Bauer on a number of issues.

Much of Gary's success, friends say, stems from his heartfelt belief in his work. "He is a man of principle," says Wade Horn, head of the National Fatherhood Initiative. Other observers credit more pedestrian factors: Bauer's assembling a crack staff of policy analysts, his ability to target issues to generate buzz (China, the per-child tax credit, partial-birth abortion), FRC's effective use of direct mail, the meticulousness of its policy papers — and a healthy dose of old-fashioned hard work. D'Souza points to the Promise Keepers' October gathering in Washington as an illustration of Bauer's tireless networking. "When the Promise Keepers came to town Gary saw it as a great opportunity. FRC people were out there handing out flyers. They were everywhere. Gary got tons of letters and requests after that — and lots of new names for his computer database."

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL

But all the networking in the world wouldn't have put Bauer in the realm of "Most Formidable Conservative" without the convergence of three key events: his campaign against the U.S.' trade policy with China; Ralph Reed's departure from the Christian Coalition; and Bauer's successful foray into the realm of campaign fund-raising.

Launched in the months leading up to Congress' vote on China's MFN status, Bauer's relentless, bipartisan campaign against renewal gained him major media play as something other than a family-values firebrand. In addition to sounding off in forums ranging from *The New York Times* to the National Press Club, Bauer proved himself a tough debater on PBS' "Firing Line" last October, more than holding his own against opponents such as William F. Buckley and Henry Kissinger. Playing to the crowd, Bauer drew applause with his response to assertions by Netscape CEO Jim Barksdale that the key to opening up China is the exchange of cultural ideas through trade: "It wasn't 'Dallas' that brought the Soviet Union down," said Bauer. "It was Ronald Reagan being willing to speak the truth to evil." Bauer even managed to inject some humor into the debate. Asked his prediction on the political effects of China's reclamation of Hong Kong, he noted, "I expect that Democratic fundraising will be a lot easier now."

Folks in Washington were intrigued by Bauer's role in the China battle. As the Heritage foundation's Robert Rector puts it, "This is your classic Amnesty International type of issue." It is also right in line with Bauer's belief that America's "core values," such as its commitment to human and religious rights, should not be subordinated to economics. In fact, Bauer has taken similar stands against a number of the GOP's more libertarian economic positions. In the economic-populist tradition of Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot, Bauer maintains that "country club Republicans" harm the average American by failing to recognize the importance of "human capital." For instance, Bauer opposes Social Security privatization because it would discriminate against stay-at-home moms. (Under the current system, a widow who has never worked outside the home is nonetheless entitled to 100 percent of her husband's benefits. Most privatization plans include no such provision.) In this sense, says Adam Meyerson, editor of Heritage's *Policy Review* magazine, "Bauer probably speaks for the Reagan Democrats more than any other political leader in the country."

Though Bauer's unorthodox lobbying tactics on China contributed to his heightened profile, equal weight must be given to the departure of *Wunderkind* Ralph Reed from the Christian Coalition. ("The fact that Ralph isn't out there grabbing the headlines every five minutes is part of [Gary's rise]," says Collen Paro, head of the Republican National Coalition for Life.) The mainstream media has only so much room for social conservatives, and Reed, with his telegenic looks and style, was long the movement's media darling. Comforted and dazzled by an apparent Christian ideologue who sounded and functioned soothingly like a political operative, GOP politicians also embraced Reed as the perfect messenger for the movement — one who would help keep the ideologues from getting out of hand. When Reed stepped down as director of the Coalition last July, he opened the field for other spokesmen to emerge.

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Enter Gary Bauer. With a reputation as less compromising and more dogmatic than Reed, Bauer was initially viewed as a mixed blessing for a party concerned about its extremist image. But in his increasingly frequent media appearances, Bauer has bucked the conventional wisdom about him, displaying a remarkable talent for delivering conservative messages without alienating liberal viewers. In a February appearance on NBC's "Meet The Press," Bauer radiated common sense and graciousness even as he gigged the president about the Lewinsky scandal: "When Hillary Clinton said it takes a village to raise a child, she touched on an interesting point," Bauer told a sour looking Bob Novak. "It does. It takes parents, teachers, counselors, pastors, and it takes moral leadership at the top, including the president of the United States."

Bauer's media savvy recently made a convert of GOP pollster Frank Luntz. Despite initial misgivings about Bauer, says Luntz, he was blown away by viewer tests conducted in February in which, out of a dozen or so commentators discussing the Clinton-Lewinsky hubbub on the political chat shows, Bauer overwhelmingly received the most favorable response from Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike. "Gary has figured out that it works to be nice," says Tony Snow, the host of "Fox News Sunday." "His interview style these days is to be simple, plain-spoken — not angry or confrontational. In other words, he has learned from Clinton." Most Americans feel that nobody in Washington cares, explains Snow, but Clinton and Bauer answer that, "talking in concrete and vivid terms, and connecting with people's actual experiences." This, says Snow, makes Bauer "unlike 99 percent of other Republicans, who get up there and show bar charts about the balanced budget."

Not surprisingly, Bauer credits his ability to charm even "hostile" audiences to lessons taken from The Great Communicator himself: "I think it's important that we talk about these difficult issues in a Reaganesque way — not an angry way, but in a way that appeals to people's hearts." Sharply differentiating himself from other prominent social conservatives such as Pat Buchanan and Phyllis Schlafly, "Gary is more oriented toward carrots than sticks," says Michael Schwartz, executive director of the congressional family caucus. His media appearances are peppered with talk of hope, love, patriotism, and his visions for America's future. At the Jan. 13 Conservative Political Action Conference, Bauer discussed the upcoming presidential race in decidedly Reanganesque terms. Encouraging the audience not to focus on polls or politics or even whether the next occupant of the Oval Office is a Democrat or a Republican, he opined: "With the right leadership, our best days can still be ahead. And I want to work with you so that in the year 2000 we will elect a president that will enable us to turn to our children and without hesitancy say, 'Son, America is still a shining city upon a hill.'"

In many ways, Bauer's ascendancy has paralleled the emerging identity crises of the Republican party and of its leading social-conservative ally, the Christian Coalition. In 1996, Bob Dole was patently uncomfortable with the right wing of the party, and virtually indistinguishable from centrist-Democrat Clinton. At the same time, Republican leaders, fretting over the extremist image the 1994 congressional freshmen had given the party, launched a fevered campaign to convince voters that the GOP is an all-encompassing tent under which everyone from pro-life crusader Phyllis Schlafly to pro-choice Gov. Christie Whitman can peacefully coexist. This only succeeded in further alienating social conservatives, wounding both the Republican party and the Christian Coalition. Grumbling that Republicans had forsaken their social agenda and that Reed had essentially turned the Coalition into an adjunct of the Republican National Committee, social conservatives began looking around for a more faithful messenger.

Out of this discontent rose Bauer's pro-family political action committee, the Campaign for Working Families. And whereas the Washington political establishment may have taken a while to notice Bauer's fund-raising acumen at the nonprofit FRC, it was considerably quicker to note his skill at garnering political contributions. (To put things in perspective, compare the $2.6 million CWF took in last year with the mere $235,000 Sen. John Ashcroft's PAC raised.) But CWF *really* grabbed Congress' attention in February when, in a GOP congressional primary in California, it sank $100,000 of those contributions into the campaign of pro-life conservative Tom Bordanaro, the underdog in a race against the more moderate Brooks Firestone, House Speaker Newt Gingrich's candidate of choice. Gingrich's guy lost, and Bauer spun the event as a victory for the social-conservative agenda. "We're sending a clear message here that the part of the party that I'm affiliated with is not going to tolerate any more being played for suckers," he says.

A Political Animal?

Which brings us to the question of where Gary Bauer plans to go from here. Though he says he has yet to make a final decision about a run for the White House, Bauer is exhibiting symptoms of the presi-

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dential itch. (There are rumors he's even started approaching folks about forming a campaign team.) Pitching CWF's success as a popular mandate for a true social-conservative candidacy, Bauer occasionally talks as if he were already in the race: "CWF shows an ability to raise political funds," explained Bauer in a recent interview at FRC's posh new Washington headquarters. "All of the other major candidates have set up PACs for exactly that reason and we've outraised them all, from Dan Quayle to John Ashcroft. I think the fact that people have responded is a sign that there's a real marketplace out there for a little bit more firm and aggressive approach on these issues."

Bauer acknowledges that he would be "the longest of long shots." Still, he is confident that his years of work for the pro-family cause would translate into a solid showing at the polls. Even the recent survey of Christian Coalition leaders that named Senator Ashcroft as their candidate of choice doesn't phase Bauer. "All indications are that Pat Robertson personally leans toward John Ashcroft. The Christian Coalition people themselves, however, are the same people who listen to Focus on the Family and are on my mailing list. And if I went for this, I'm confident that I would get a major portion of those individuals' support."

Bauer also stands as a prime candidate to get the coveted backing of Focus on the Family's James Dobson. This possibility became all the more real in February, when in a speech to the conservative Council for National Policy, Dobson suggested that maybe the time has come for him to withdraw his support from the GOP — taking with him as many of his 5 million radio listeners as possible. Dobson (and Bauer) subsequently mailed out thousands of copies of this speech, and news of Dobson's threat showed up in both *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times.*

The possibility that Dobson would use his considerable stature in the conservative community to steer voters away from the GOP's establishment candidates — and perhaps toward Bauer — is something Bauer himself has clearly given some thought. Realizing Dobson's support would be essential to a presidential run, Bauer both emphasizes and jealously guards their close relationship. "I talk to Jim almost every day. He certainly cannot endorse candidates through Focus on the Family, but he has individually endorsed candidates in the past. We're working very closely together and he's been very encouraging without doing a formal endorsement." Bauer and Dobson recently conducted a joint direct-mail campaign for an upcoming Republican primary in Illinois. And in late February, when it was misreported that Dobson had sent John Ashcroft a note privately endorsing the senator's presidential candidacy, Bauer promptly trooped down to Ashcroft's office to clarify the misunderstanding.

One thing is clear: No one around Washington seems particularly enthused about the prospect of Bauer running. At this stage, those with little interest in the "pro-family" agenda don't want Bauer spotlighting issues such as abortion and getting the social conservatives riled up. Meanwhile, many who do support such an agenda fear Bauer doesn't have a prayer of winning the nomination and will only harm the cause by siphoning votes from a more "viable" candidate such as Ashcroft or Steve Forbes — effectively handing the nomination once again to a social moderate.

Even those close to Bauer admit that much of what has made him successful at FRC also disqualifies him for the presidency: "He doesn't trim his sails"; "He is uncompromising"; "He's an ideologue." Then, of course, there's the Truman Capote thing. Fair or not, a diminutive, somewhat anemic looking guy is not the stuff of which modern American presidents are made. Intellect and character are all well and good, but we like our politicians with an engaging smile, loads of charisma, and a bit of a John Wayne swagger. "Gary doesn't have the kind of star quality that is important in a president," says Dinesh D'Souza. "He won't turn a head when he walks into a room. He's unobtrusive."

Understandably, Bauer's potential competitors are perhaps the most antsy. In its December cover story, *The Weekly Standard* reported that both Dan Quayle and Bay Buchanan (Pat's sister and erstwhile campaign coordinator) have asked Bauer to leave the social-conservative vote to the professionals. Bauer says he's well aware of all the grumbling about his splitting the vote but notes: "These things aren't anointed. Nobody has the right to keep everybody else out. We should just let people hear our approach on things and let them make the judgments." For his part, Bauer says he would happily endorse a candidate who seemed willing to make pro-family values a mainstay of his or her campaign. But so far, says Bauer, he remains "very disappointed" with what he's seen.

Even if Bauer doesn't make it very far out of the starting gate, his cause still stands to gain from his candidacy, either by his gathering enough support to be a power player at the next Republican convention or by his simply forcing social issues onto other candidates' radar screens. A run would also win Bauer greater public recognition, alerting like-minded conservatives nationwide to his cause — and doubtless translating into still bigger fund-raising numbers in the future. Not bad for a nerdy little ideologue.

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How *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the Independent Counsel Law Screwed Bruce Babbitt

By Robert Worth

REPUBLICAN CONGRESSMEN RARELY wax rhapsodic about *The New York Times* in the middle of a committee hearing. But that is exactly what Rep. Christopher Cox did on Jan. 21, during the House investigation of Bruce Babbitt. He singled out the *Times* for "bringing out the facts in connection with this matter, which have led most people to predict that an independent counsel will be required to investigate" Babbitt's role in the alleged sale of a Departmental decision on an indian casino for Democratic campaign donations.

Congressman Cox didn't know how right he was. When Attorney General Janet Reno submitted her request for an independent counsel three weeks later, she referred twice to news reports as the basis for her decision. The AG is forbidden by a provision of the independent counsel statute from using any of the traditional fact-finding methods — subpoenas, grand jury, and immunity — in determining whether allegations against public officials have any merit. Working under these constraints and the 90-day time limit imposed by the statute, Reno was scarcely better informed than the ordinary citizens who have read about the accusations against Babbitt in the *Times* and *The Washington Post*.

It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the *Times* and the *Post*, which determine newspaper and television news coverage throughout the country, helped to squeeze the notorious "hair trigger" of the independent counsel (IC) statute. In so doing, they opened up the third major investigation of the Babbitt affair — an investigation that is certain to be far longer, more costly, and more destructive to the people involved than either of the previous two. As one senator said about IC investigations: "Reputations are savaged, effectiveness in office is crippled, and there is lingering suspicion even though an investigatory target is exonerated." Most important, from the perspective of the Republican congressmen who targeted him, is that Babbitt will in all likelihood be struck from the top of Clinton's list of replacements for Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who is likely to retire from the Supreme Court soon.

That would be appropriate if any of the evidence uncovered so far pointed to malfeasance on Babbitt's part. After all, everyone agrees that the 1996 campaigns hit a new low in money-grubbing by both parties. If there were indications that a Cabinet official had actually altered policy in exchange for donations, it would be worth every penny spent to find the culprits and punish them severely. There's just one problem: There is no such evidence. The House and Senate investigating committees have ascertained that lobbyists *tried* to influence the decision about the casino. But as the *Monthly* reported last December, the civil servant who made the final call — George Skibine — appears to have done so on the project's merits, without political interference.

That hasn't stopped the *Times* and the *Post*. In the past six months, the *Times* has run 23 stories and editorials about the Babbitt affair, the *Post* 24. The Skibine explanation appears in only three stories in the *Times* and three in the *Post*, almost always in the last paragraphs. Both papers have also ignored or underplayed a considerable body of other exculpatory evidence about the casino decision. The overwhelming impression has been of a "torrent of memorandums and testimony that strongly suggest," as one *Times* story put it, that Babbitt was complicit in a quid pro quo. The editors of the *Times* appear to want blood from the Clinton administration, and they are not

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particular about how they get it.

"Look Beyond Bruce Babbitt," opined the *Times* editorial page after Reno announced her decision. Apparently the editors of our paper of record believe Clinton's cabinet is so thick with guilt that there's no need to even aim: Just keep firing, you're bound to hit someone guilty sooner or later. Never mind that the casualty, in this case, is a public servant legendary for his honesty, or that the potential beneficiaries of Reno's decision include the gambling industry and the shady financiers who hide behind the facade of "indian gaming." The story of Bruce Babbitt's downfall is a morality tale about how our obsession with political scandal blinds us to the real dangers of bad law and bad policy.

Dangerous Gaming

There's no question that the Babbitt affair looks fishy when viewed from the outside. The undisputed facts are as follows: On July 14, 1995, the Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs denied an application by three indian tribes to take land in trust for an off-reservation gaming casino in Hudson, Wis., at the site of a failing dog track. The casino was opposed by several other tribes with lucrative casinos in the same area, who had hired lobbyists to press their cause with the White House, and ultimately contributed $282,500 to national Democratic campaign committees. On the day the casino was turned down, Secretary Babbitt agreed to meet briefly with Paul Eckstein, an old friend and former campaign manager, who was working at the time as a lobbyist for the casino applicants. Eckstein testified a few months later (in a suit filed by the casino applicants against the Interior Department) that Babbitt had told him he was under pressure from White House Deputy Chief of Staff Harold Ickes to make a decision about the casino. In a letter to Sen. John McCain in 1996, Babbitt denied that he had ever spoken to Ickes about the casino, or that he had told Eckstein of any specific pressure from Ickes. A year later, in a letter to Sen. Fred Thompson, Babbitt acknowledged that he might have "said something to the effect that Mr. Ickes wanted a decision ... simply as a means of terminating our discussion and getting him out the door."

The story got scant attention until 1997, when Harold Ickes became a focus of widespread allegations of campaign finance abuse during the '96 elections. Suddenly Babbitt's alleged mention of Ickes began to look like the "smoking gun" Sen. Fred Thompson and other Republicans on the Senate Governmental Affairs committee were hoping for. Eager to break a major corruption story, the *Times* and the *Post* went on the offensive. They published stories highlighting the efforts of anti-casino lobbyists (who were indeed granted far too much access to White House officials). They implied that the department's decision to turn down the casino application was highly suspect, since it had been approved by the regional BIA office in Minneapolis. They cited documents uncovered by the Thompson committee allegedly showing that at least one BIA staffer in Washington appeared inclined to approve the application only a month before the decision was announced. *Times* columnist William Safire went much further, asserting in a Dec. 31 article that the staff at Interior had agreed to approve the application but were reversed by Babbitt and his cronies in the White House.

Meanwhile, the *Post* consistently described the defeated casino applicants as "impoverished tribes" up against the hired guns of "casino-rich" tribes. The *Times* editorial page claimed that Babbitt had told Eckstein that "Ickes wanted the decision made in favor of the Democratic donors," suggesting that the fix was part of a general trend of corruption by the Clinton administration during the '96 campaign. One *Post* story even implied that Clinton himself pressured Ickes and DNC Chairman Don Fowler to kill the casino application. In short, the story that emerged in the papers was a variation on a theme as old as Manifest Destiny: Uncle Sam screws the indians and then lies about it.

These are the allegations that led Janet Reno to turn the IC dogs loose on Babbitt. How do they hold up? Let's start with what Babbitt *did* do wrong. First, it's plausible that Babbitt would invoke Ickes (who was the White House contact person for many Interior matters, and whose father's portrait hangs outside Babbitt's offices) to get a pesky lobbyist out of his office. But it was stupid. Even more stupid was his failure to be up front about having done so when McCain first asked him about it.

But the *Times* and the *Post* magnified Babbitt's error, making it sound like he flat-out lied or "offered several contradictory accounts of his role," as one *Post* story put it. They also obscured the fact that Eckstein changed his own story more substantially than Babbitt ever did. When he first testified in 1996, Eckstein made no mention of Babbitt having said anything about campaign donations, even though it would have been crucial to the case against Interior. Only in 1997, two years after the conversation and

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after campaign finance had become a subject of scandal, did he claim that Babbitt had asked him if he knew how much the opposing indian tribes (or indian tribes generally, Eckstein wasn't sure) had given to Democratic candidates.

Moreover, Eckstein never claimed that Babbitt said Ickes wanted the decision made any particular way, and he testified before Congress that he did *not* think Babbitt was implying that campaign donations had determined the decision. Somehow, the editorialists of the *Times* missed those points. They also failed to note that all but $5,000 of the campaign donations were made after the decision to deny the casino was made — some of them as much as 16 months later (after the election). Even if one assumes Ickes and Babbitt are corrupt enough to sell out, it's hard to imagine they wouldn't ask for more of the money up front.

As for the newspapers' claim that denying the casino was inherently suspicious: First of all, the authority for these decisions rests with the Washington office, not the regional bureaus. It is true that in five of the nine comparable cases on record, the Washington staff has ultimately agreed with the local office's recommendation, and in only two (not counting Hudson) have they actually overruled it. But the Hudson casino is a prime example of this type of case. The newspapers virtually ignored the fact that the casino was opposed by the mayor, the town council, the governor, the local congressman and senator, the state assemblymen and the politicial delegations from neighboring Minnesota, not to mention the vast majority of the local people and businesses. Many of these opponents are Republicans, unlike the Democratic donors who made front-page news. The record is replete with letters, phone calls, petitions, and delegations to Congress, all pleading for a denial. In 1993 the people of Wisconsin had actually ratified a constitutional amendment against more casino gambling.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE INTERIOR DEPARTMENT

Secretary Babbitt with members of the Crow Tribal Government at a signing ceremony for the resolution of a long-standing boundary adjustment.

But what about the three tribes who wanted the casino — don't they count? Well, no. Here's another detail the papers skipped or buried: The applicant tribes *already* have casinos on their reservations. And those reservations are 85, 185, and 200 miles away from the proposed casino site in Hudson.

So how did a group of destitute, off-site tribes have the money and the clout to hire Paul Eckstein and Patton, Boggs to lobby for them? Answer: They didn't. The real force behind the casino application was the owner of the Hudson dog track, a tremendously wealthy Florida gambling family named Hecht that has been linked to organized crime. Their local corporate identities were intentionally confusing, but all can be traced to Southwest Florida Enterprises, founded by the family patriarch Isadore Hecht, who was a friend and business associate of the late great gangster Meyer Lansky. Hecht died in 1975, but his son-in-law Neal Amdur appears to have followed in his footsteps. In 1995 Amdur was forced to resign from the board of the Hudson dog track's parent company when the Wisconsin Gaming Commission discovered his stake in a Florida gaming company with mob ties. Since that time Fred Havenick, another Hecht son-in-law, has been the front man for the dog track and casino applications.

It was Havenick, and not the "poor tribes", who hired and paid Eckstein (a fact that was often obscured in the *Times* and the *Post*). Havenick is also funding lawsuits against the city of Hudson for $175 million, as well as the Interior Department, in a desperate effort to reverse the decision. Why? Because the Hechts have sunk some $40 million into the Hudson dog-track, and they are desperate for a way to recoup their losses. They thought they had one in 1993 when they discovered a loophole in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), Congress' effort to control indian gaming, that allowed for off-reservation casinos in certain circumstances. They even

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found three local tribes who were willing to act as a front for the deal. Poor and inexperienced in business, the tribes failed to notice when the Hechts included a provision in the casino contract that saddled them with a hefty share of the dog-track's staggering debt, along with a 25-year, non-cancellable lease on a parking lot that could easily have left them even further in the hole.

In short, the Hudson casino contract was a throwback to the bad old days of indian gaming, when mafia stool pigeon Stewart Siegel testified before Congress with a hood over his head about widespread mob influence in indian casinos. Even without criminal involvement, deals between off-site, inexperienced tribes and management companies have often ended badly. In one extreme case, the Mohawks of New York State fell into a brief but bloody civil war over gaming profits stolen by their non-indian management team. Since then, most tribes have become far more savvy about managing their gaming operations, and some of the most successful tribes prefer to run the halls themselves rather than risk conflict with outsiders.

In light of this bitter history, how could the local BIA office have recommended approval for the Hudson casino in the first place? "Local BIA offices almost always approve applications," says Interior Department spokesman Michael Gauldin. This is partly because the BIA has an automatic bias in favor of gaming, which has brought massive revenues to a number of tribes. Gross revenues from indian gaming totalled $5.5 billion in 1996 (compare that to $6 billion for all of Las Vegas in the same year). "Nothing was really effective for the tribes until gaming," says William Eddington of the University of Nevada, who studies indian economic development strategies.

Still, the fact that the Hudson casino got as far as it did is a testament to the weaknesses of the BIA — which failed to see the massive holes in the application — and the indian gaming law, which should never have allowed off-reservation casinos in the first place. As it happens, the Hudson case was a critical test of the law's usefulness in determining how, if at all, such casinos should be approved.

Which brings us to William Safire's claim that the Washington indian gaming staff recommended approving the application and was reversed from above. This is sheer fabrication. (Safire did not return our phone calls.) However, the two *Times* reporters who covered the story (and defended the fairness and accuracy of their reporting in a lengthy written statement to the *Monthly*) rightly claim that there do appear to be inconsistencies in the decision-making process, and that "a meritorious decision can still be clouded by influence-peddling." They also claim that one document in particular suggests that one staff member "seemed inclined to approve the casino" late in the game. Specifically, the document in question deals with one of two necessary tests under Section 20 of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, regarding possible detriment to the community where the casino is to be located. The staffer who wrote the memo vehemently denies that it was intended as an endorsement of the casino, and virtually the entire staff agreed that the casino was a bad idea to begin with.

Still, the *Times* reporters have a point: Why was there any uncertainty about these details if the staff already intended — as they insist they did — to deny the application? Moreover, the secretary has broad powers to deny applications without giving a reason. Why was his staff even worrying about the fine print of the IGRA so late in the game?

The answer is that the staff was indeed responding to political pressure — not from Harold Ickes, but from Congress, where there was a movement among gambling opponents to gut the gaming law altogether. Recognizing the strength of this movement, the BIA staff at Interior saw that the Hudson case was a pivotal one. If they could find no language within the IGRA to prevent a casino from being forced on an unwilling community, gambling opponents would have just the ammunition they needed to kill the law. "When the Hudson case came along," says one former staff member, "we saw it as an opportunity to say: 'IGRA is not that bad. It does contain enough discretion to prevent indian gaming from being shoved down communities' throats.'" Hence the internal confusion over exactly how to kill the Hudson casino, which William Safire and most of the press corps mistook for a stifled effort to approve it.

Legal Weapon

Of course, even if all these allegations of influence-peddling are cleared away, Babbitt will still be in trouble. Few of the people who read about him in the papers will understand that Babbitt isn't even being investigated for bribery. The charge against him is perjury — that is, the independent counsel will determine whether the dissonance between Babbitt's first, incomplete account of his conversation with Eckstein and the second account is enough to indict him on.

Janet Reno would have liked to avoid this festival of pettiness, but she could not, thanks to another brilliant provision in the IC law. The law states that

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an attorney general who suspects that the target is guilty only of clumsiness, or of accidentally tripping over one of the countless minor regulations that apply to public officials, cannot prevent a full-scale investigation unless she has "clear and convincing evidence" that the official's motives were benign. Given the time limits and the constraints on her own investigation, it's almost impossible for her to obtain that evidence. This is the legal twig on which the Thompson and Burton committees — with some help from the *Times* and the *Post* — have successfully hung Bruce Babbitt.

Therein lies the sad lesson of the Babbitt affair: The independent counsel statute, which was designed to take justice above politics, has only made it more deeply and poisonously political. The roots of this legal swamp, like so much of our current obsession with political scandal, are in Watergate. After the "Saturday Night Massacre" of 1973, when Nixon fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox for trying to subpoena the Watergate tapes, Congress felt public pressure to create a legal authority that would be independent of the attorney general and the president. In fact, there was no evidence that the Justice Department couldn't do the job on its own. After Nixon fired Cox, another prosecutor (Leon Jaworski) took his place, held hearings, and prepared charges against the president. Nonetheless, there remained a public desire for a *visibly* independent prosecutor As Sen. William Cohen put it during a Senate hearing on the IC law in 1993: "The appearance of justice is just as important as justice itself, in terms of maintaining confidence in our judicial system."

In practice, the public nature of IC investigations has cast an unnaturally harsh glare on the prosecutors who carry them out, making their activities a political football for partisans in Congress. As a result, the independent counsels are bound to protect themselves from accusations of laxity by proving that they have pursued every angle Oliver Stone could dream up, no matter whose boardrooms and bedrooms it leads them through. Unlike ordinary U.S. attorneys, IC's have a blank check and unlimited time to pursue their investigations. Since 1990, eight IC's have spent more than $80 million of taxpayer money. As Gerard Lynch, former associate counsel in two IC investigations, and author Philip Howard put it: "In the ordinary case, the U.S. Attorney has to ask himself: Is it fair to treat this case as a felony, as compared to how we treat other, similar cases where the defendant was not politically prominent? The special prosecutor has no such concerns. He has only one investigation to pursue, and the unnatural intensity skews the decision. The smallest infraction takes on a life of its own."

Their targets, meanwhile, must pay for their defense out of their own pockets, and often at the cost of their careers, health, and sanity. Assistant Attorney General Theodore Olsen, who was never ultimately charged with any crime, spent $1.3 million defending himself and took to "jogging by flashlight in the middle of the night" to relieve the stress induced by the investigation. In the Babbitt case, many of the Interior Department officials who have already testified for many hours for the earlier investigations will now be forced to defend themselves again, at their own expense. As one Interior official puts it: "Maybe you were being a little sarcastic one day in an email with a co-worker. And suddenly you have to wonder whether you'll be facing a criminal investigation. It's Kafkaesque."

But Babbitt and his deputies aren't the only ones who will suffer from the insanity of the IC law. "We are ruining the Justice Department by constantly saying to people that it cannot investigate public officials," says former independent counsel Joseph diGenova (who is no friend to the Clinton administration, as anyone who has watched TV coverage of Monicagate knows). And the sight of congressmen furiously accusing cabinet officials of offenses they and their peers committ regularly is not exactly an advertisement for public service. "This is having a horrendous effect," says diGenova. "People don't want to go into government."

Like a number of other prosecutors, diGenova favors dropping the law and returning high-level investigations to their traditional home in the Justice Department. Another option would be to restrict the law to the president, vice-president, and attorney general for offenses committed in office only, and grant the AG the power to conduct an initial investigation before appointing an independent counsel.

These reforms would save us from another political circus like Monicagate or the Babbitt affair. They would also help to clear up one of the most disturbing aspects of the IC law: its tendency to corral reporters into high-profile witch-hunts and away from the issues that really matter. In the Babbitt case, instead of asking how a shady Florida gambling empire successfully turned the tables on a cabinet secretary, the editors of the *Times* and the *Post* were happy to follow the scandal machine wherever it led. And instead of asking whether every "appearance of impropriety" requires us to launch another legal juggernaut, they jumped on the bandwagon — and failed to notice that the evidence wasn't there.

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Tidbits & Outrages

Thank God They Remembered to Give Him Chapstick

An Irish soldier has filed suit against the army, claiming the military's failure to issue him sunscreen while he was on a peacekeeping mission caused him to contract skin cancer.

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But Not Their Egos

A Detroit researcher has discovered that men's brains shrink much more rapidly with age than do women's.

Phantome de L'Aeroport

An Iranian man who was detained in the Charles de Gaulle airport in 1988 has been living in one of the terminals for the past 10 years.

They Traded the Goalie for a Six-Pack of Bud Light

Strapped for cash, a soccer club in Romania traded one of its players to another team in exchange for two tons of beef and pork. The team president says the meat will be sold to pay the other players' salaries.

ART: RENEE WINFIELD

But What About Its Sanity?

Three dozen staff members of a London-based direct marketing firm posed naked for a magazine ad aimed at convincing clients of the company's trustworthiness.

You Should See the Radical Party Ads!

For the 1998 elections, Sweden's Center Party ran political ads featuring a naked woman.

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A Health-Care Plan Most of Us Could Buy

It's right under Congress' nose

BY ERIC B. SCHNURER

RUTH KAIN DIDN'T EXACTLY get the best deal possible. Kain lives in the little town of Ava, Mo., where she and her husband of 47 years, Rufus, settled after he retired in 1990. Rufus had been able to retain his company health insurance until he qualified for Medicare, at which point Ruth was allowed by Rufus' former employer to buy a COBRA plan for 36 months. When that expired, Ruth was 63 and not yet eligible for Medicare; nor, as a result of a heart ailment constituting a "pre-existing condition," could she find a private insurer willing to cover her in the interim.

Ruth Kain is just the type of person legislators were trying to help when they passed the 1996 Kennedy-Kassebaum bill requiring insurance companies to provide coverage even to Americans with pre-existing medical conditions. Alas, private carriers have hardly been leaping to assume this new responsibility. (I know: You are shocked — *shocked* — to hear that health insurers wouldn't insure people who need health care.) Many penalize agents who write such policies, while one — exploiting a loophole in the law that says insurers need not provide coverage for a condition that has gone uninsured for the last 63 days — actually stretches out the processing of applications from individuals with pre-existing conditions for more than 63 days, and then routinely denies the request. When they do make coverage available, it is often at rates double the norm.

The end result: Even with Kennedy-Kassebaum in place, Kain couldn't obtain insurance that would cover her heart problems. And sure enough, as all such stories go, after shelling out $10,000 for a pacemaker that her policy didn't cover, she began experiencing severe chest pains last November and wound up spending Thanksgiving in the hospital. To cover the bill for her stay — a daunting $14,000 — she and Rufus were forced to sell the farm they lived on.

Clearly, Ruth Kain had gotten a bum deal.

President Clinton seemed to agree. In January, he proposed an expansion of Medicare, the federal health insurance program for the elderly, to cover people like Kain. Under the Clinton plan, retirees from age 62 to 65, as well as people over age 55 who have been laid off and lost insurance, could buy into Medicare for more or less the actual price of such coverage. (Those in the early retiree group would pay slightly lower premiums than other new entrants, but would make up for it with slightly higher monthly payments once admitted to "regular" Medicare at 65.) This is a pretty good deal, cheaper-by-half than the $1,000-a-month that Kain could expect to pay a private insurer — assuming she could find one willing to issue her a policy. And so white-haired Ruth Kain from Ava, Mo., stood by Bill Clinton in the White House three months ago as the president unveiled his grand plan.

Republicans, with their usual flair, promptly declared the president's proposal Dead On Arrival. First they wheeled out the standard objection to Medicare expansion: With the impending retirement of the massive Baby Boom generation, the system is already too financially shaky to pile even more beneficiaries onto the program. ("If you're on the Titan-

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ic, you wouldn't invite more people to join you," huffed one GOP congressman.) But Clinton basically rendered this argument moot by proposing that recipients essentially pay their own way.

A slightly more sophisticated criticism of the plan is that it would worsen Medicare's financial problems through "adverse selection." Unlike Social Security or Medicare Part A, the president's buy-in program would be voluntary, which means a disproportionate number of the people flocking to sign up for it would be those having trouble finding alternative coverage at a reasonable price — i.e., those who present the worst health risk and thus bear the highest price-tag for coverage. This, say critics, would eventually drive Medicare's per-person costs higher, rendering it a not-so-good deal for those already in it.

Finally, Republicans fear The Slippery Slope and are aware that such a program could eventually lead to — gasp! — health insurance for all Americans, not just the old. This, of course, is the real specter haunting the right, though they have yet to articulate why wiping out the ranks of the uninsured (without using tax subsidies, mind you) is such a bad thing.

But, whatever the merits of their various concerns, on one very important point, the Republicans are right: This was still not the best deal Ruth Kain could have been offered.

We could, instead, allow Americans to buy into another existing government program, one that does not possess the problematic fiscal "pre-existing condition" that Medicare does. One in which the phenomenon of "adverse selection" is minimized. One in which the sort of consumer choice that conservatives claim they want to inject into government-run health coverage — particularly Medicare — already exists, with a vengeance. One that might actually save taxpayers money if it were expanded. One that it might even make sense to expand to all Americans. The program that could do all this? The Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, or FEHBP — pronounced, rather disconcertingly, as "Feeb."

The People's Choice

With nearly 10 million enrollees nationwide, FEHBP constitutes the largest medical plan in the United States. All federal employees — as well as members of Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Cabinet — are eligible for coverage. While employees elsewhere hope for "cafeteria plans," FEHBP enrollees are treated to a virtual Valhalla of smorgasbords: A total of 380 health plans nationwide participate in FEHBP, offering the average beneficiary at least a dozen options for coverage in her locality, ranging from managed care to traditional fee-for-service. It allows enrollees to choose their own physicians. Even before Kennedy-Kassebaum, it basically insured everyone in its population, regardless of pre-existing conditions. There is no cancellation for catastrophic illness. And if the plan you choose isn't working out for you, the annual "open season" allows you easily to switch insurers within a year. Consumer satisfaction is strikingly high: 87 percent for those in fee-for-service plans and 85 percent for those in HMOs.

Most of FEHBP's features are not available to the vast majority of Americans — including beneficiaries of Medicare, where more and more seniors are simply being herded into managed care. One might therefore expect that this Cadillac of coverage plans suffers from gold-plated prices. One would be wrong. As health-care costs exploded between 1982 and 1994, FEHBP's average premium rose by approximately 3.5 percent less than did premiums for private-sector, big-business group plans. In 1994, Republican Sen. Ted Stevens (ironically, in a statement opposing extending FEHBP to non-government employees) explained: "The system holds down growth in costs by forcing insurers to compete for customers by providing the best service at the lowest premiums."

How low? One of the largest insurers in the program, the Government Employees Health Association, offers a fee-for-service plan for single individuals at a cost of $2,548 a year ($212 per month), including both the employee's and the government's share. The full-family version prices out at $5,496 ($458 per month). The Blue Cross standard package available to FEHBP families costs $5,254 a year — about 13 percent less than the similar Blue plan offered to small groups, and $1,000 less than the average conventional plan available to the largest employers.

With this kind of competitive pricing, it's not surprising that fans ranging from Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) to the Heritage Foundation have hailed FEHBP as a model for health-care reform. Republican Sen. William Roth of Delaware — co-author of the Reagan-era Kemp-Roth tax cut intended to slash government — proposed several years ago that uninsured Americans, the self-employed, and members of small groups be allowed to buy into the program. "The FEHBP is a government sponsored,

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private-sector operated, nationwide health care delivery system," Roth observed at the time. "It has a proven record. It could serve as an excellent vehicle for providing health care to those in our country who need it but can't afford it because they are not part of a large group." (Roth's proposal, dubbed "CareNet," would have also subsidized the purchase of coverage by the unemployed by eliminating uncompensated care reimbursements to hospitals — essentially buying the poor competitively priced insurance instead of waiting to pay for their expensive emergency room care.) Senator Stevens similarly declared that FEHBP "deserves to be recognized as a basic success in health-care insurance."

Did anyone tell these guys that this is a government program?

Of course, the secret of FEHBP's success can be pinned on a fact that has nothing — and yet everything — to do with its government nature. Yes, part of FEHBP's success lies in the fact that private companies, not a government bureaucracy, design, offer, and administer the benefits; that market competition, not governmental *diktat*, determines both inputs and outcomes; and that the program is voluntary, not mandatory like Medicare and Social Security (although, with the government paying a large share of the premiums, an eligible individual would have to be nuts not to enroll). But the main reason the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program can cut such good deals with insurers rests on the most basic of capitalist concepts: Market Power. When it comes to access to health-insurance consumers, FEHBP is the 10-million-pound gorilla. The brass ring. The Holy Grail. With 10 million people looking to spend about $1,000 apiece each year — $10 billion! — on your product, what insurer wouldn't offer a sweet deal in order to get a piece of the action? In essence, it's the same sort of advantage that entrepreneurs like John D. Rockefeller have understood and pressed since the time of Croesus. Only here's the catch: The predator exploiting its oligopsony (that's the demand-side version of "oligopoly") power is the government. So far, even Bill Gates hasn't been able to put together the purchasing clout of the federal government. And therein lies not just the path to more affordable, more consumer-friendly health coverage for more Americans, but a template for the role of government in the future — a future in which there will be more competition and government will be less powerful, less like government as we've known it in the Industrial Age and more like ... what? Like FEHBP!

The Big Offer

If Congress just let the rest of us in on its health-care deal, insurance would no longer be a problem for the great majority of Americans. Of course, some of the same concerns about Clinton's Medicare proposal would have to be addressed. Which brings us back to the issue of adverse selection. As with the Medicare expansion idea, the people who would find the chance to buy into FEHBP most appealing are those who arguably present the greatest risk of high health-care costs: small business owners and employees, other non-group members, and those who are legally entitled to coverage under Kennedy-Kassebaum but can't afford it. But this will prove less of a problem than it first appears — and certainly less than with the Clinton plan.

First, we need to separate the "high risk" group into two categories: statistical and actual. Small businesses and their workers currently pay more for insurance than do large groups — not because they have higher health-care costs, but because they pose higher statistical risks. Think of it like this: Could you better predict the likely outcome of one coin flip or of a thousand? With one flip, the odds are as good that you'll be completely wrong as that you'll be right; with a thousand, if you guess half heads and half tails, the odds are overwhelming that you'll be reasonably close. If you're at all risk-averse, or simply want to plan your finances intelligently, you'd prefer the relatively predictable outcome of a thousand tosses. This is what statisticians call "The Law of Large Numbers": the bigger the group, the smaller the risk (unless, of course, the group is selected on the basis of some risk factor, such as being residents of a leper colony). Thus, if members of a small group were suddenly made members of a large group, their "riskiness," and therefore their insurance costs, would automatically decline. In fact — and this is a crucial point — so would the riskiness and costs of the large group, because it just got even larger.

Of course, the uninsured and those with pre-existing conditions, whose actual health-care costs are typically higher than average, pose a somewhat different problem. They are more like the members of the leper colony — and are treated as such in the marketplace. If these folks are allowed to buy into a program like FEHBP at the same price as the average consumer, most will jump at the chance, because it's significantly cheaper than what risk-related policies would run them. In doing so, they will drive up the cost of care for the insurance pool, resulting in either lower profit margins for the insurer or higher

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premiums for all other consumers. (Guess which.) This, at least, was the argument in 1994 when then-Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Maine) proposed expanding FEHBP to these groups.

In reality, however, most of the people in these categories couldn't afford to participate in a buy-in program without some sort of government subsidy like that proposed by Senator Roth under CareNet. And, strictly speaking, buy-ins aren't about subsidies. Some people might question whether this then undermines the point of health-care reform. But this begs the question. "Reform for whom?" Without doubt, it's terrible that 18 percent of non-elderly Americans have no health insurance. But 82 percent of the population has overpriced coverage. And lowering the costs of insurance overall will ultimately lead to more of the uninsured population being able to afford coverage (as well as cutting the cost to taxpayers of subsidizing coverage for the rest, should the welfare state ever make a come-back — but that's a different article). The point here is that FEHBP would be unlikely to be flooded by high-cost patients.

In any event, it turns out that FEHBP already starts with a higher-than-average-cost insurance pool: As a general rule, the older the individual, the higher the health-care costs. And while the average age of workers in the private sector is only 37.7 years, federal workers are significantly older — 43.8 years, on average. What's more, 40 percent of FEHBP enrollees are retirees. So just on the basis of health spending patterns, FEHBP already is not the insurance pool ideal. Why does it achieve such good bargains then? Because of the Law of Large Numbers and the Law of the Market. And it will continue to do so even — perhaps especially — if large numbers of small-business employees and the currently uninsured choose to join. (In fact, many of the uninsured are actually young people who don't present high risks but see current insurance options as not worth the price; if they were to buy into FEHBP's over-aged pool, they would actually improve the average risk. Thus, KPMG Peat Marwick recently concluded that adding *all* the uninsured to smaller *state* government employee-risk pools "should not raise premiums considerably.")

Moreover, if FEHBP enrollment is open to anyone, it is not just these more marginal groups who will join: Employees of any business could switch, especially if their employer continues to pay the same share of the premiums. And why wouldn't they? With wider choice, greater consumer protections, higher satisfaction, and greater market power, the federal plan is a great deal if you can get it. And the best part is: The more people who take advantage of the offer, the better a deal it becomes. Why? Because of the Law of Large Numbers and the Law of the Market.

In short, if the government became the "buying cooperative" for all of us, it could use its market clout to obtain better and better deals in the private market. This would have three effects: It would provide new and improved options for the millions of Americans looking for a better deal on their health insurance. Second, by enlarging the FEHBP pool, it would lower rates for FEHBP enrollees, meaning that the costs taxpayers are currently bearing for federal employee benefits would decrease. Third, even those Americans who chose not to buy into FEHBP would likely experience improvement in their insurance coverage. Why? Because they (or, at least, their employers) would always have the option of leaving their current plan and signing on with FEHBP if other players in the market didn't keep pace with the federal plan. The huge federal buying co-op, then, would keep constant competitive pressure on the market to lower prices and improve satisfaction for all consumers.

If Congress just let the rest of us in on its health-care deal, insurance would no longer be a problem for the great majority of Americans.

The government's role in this process would not be as a regulator or provider. (Recall the Republican elegy to FEHBP as a program of private-sector provided services chosen by participants through market mechanisms.) The government would act purely as a market participant, as a voluntary association of citizens, as an aggregator of consumer preferences. With government serving as a large purchasing co-operative into which any American could voluntarily buy (starting with the "critical mass" of 10 million federal employees), we would have the advantages attributed to a "single payer" system of health insurance, but without drawbacks such as inefficient government bureaucracy and involuntary participation.

Examples of government acting in such a role

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already exist. The Clinton administration's direct-lending program for student loans, for instance, was so successful that banks, who were losing out on the business, demanded that the "pro-competition" Republican Congress curtail it. The Postal Service's ability to compete successfully with private shippers has drawn similar opposition. God forbid that the federal government should actually offer something *more* efficiently than the private sector!

But the fact is that it can — aggregating the interests of millions of small economic actors, achieving economies of scale. Governments everywhere are losing the abilities to tax, regulate, and redistribute resources. Is there anything to replace them? Yes: facil-

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

It used to be that journalists did not write about the parties they went to. The occasions would be regarded as social, off-the-record but nevertheless useful for leads and other background information. But, as they say, we've come a long way, baby. In the last month or so **R.W. ("Johnny") Apple** has described in *The New York Times* a dinner he attended at the British Embassy, **Tina Brown** has given the inside skinny on a White House dinner to the readers of *The New Yorker*, and **William Safire** has used the *Times* op-ed page to recount his conversations at a New Year's party at the house of **Ben Bradlee** and **Sally Quinn**.

Several leading authors including **Doris Lessing** and **Faye Weldman** are threatening to leave HarperCollins, according to Agence France Presse, if it is confirmed that its owner **Rupert Murdoch** tried to censor a book by the former governor of Hong Kong, **Chris Patten**. Murdoch is said not to have been pleased by Patten's criticism of the government of China, where the media magnate wants to do business. Other luminaries of the Murdoch empire who have yet to speak up include **William Kristol** and **Fred Barnes** of *The Weekly Standard*, **John Podhoretz** of the *New York Post*, **Brit Hume** and **Tony Snow** of Fox News.

After New York Gov. **George Pataki** flubbed some questions about the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill at a press luncheon hosted by *The Christian Science Monitor*'s **Godfrey Sperling Jr.**, Sperling asked, "If you decide to run for president, aren't you going to have to spend a little time catching up on some of the national issues?"

"Oh, I think I can probably fake it," Pataki answered. Then after a pause, according to *The New York Times*, he said, "Since we're on the record, that was a joke."

Speaking of **Tony Snow**, we hear it was he who introduced **Linda Tripp** to **Lucianne Goldberg**. Even if he just knew them both, you can bet your boots he will be a featured player in White House conspiracy theories.

An attractive woman emerges from the Oval Office, lipstick smeared, her blouse untucked, a distraught look on her face. **Lloyd Bentsen** and **Leon Panetta** are standing there waiting to go in. Wouldn't they have noticed? Couldn't this be evidence that **Kathleen Willey** is lying? No. Veteran Washingtonians tell us that when people are preparing to enter the Oval Office, their thoughts are so preoccupied with what they're going to say and how they look that they don't really see anything or anyone, not even a damsel in distress.

Ted Widmer, the director of speech writing for the National Security Council, has also been known as **Lord Rockingham**, a sometime member of the rock and roll band The Upper Crust. He appears on the cover of the group's album "Decline and Fall," which was released a few months ago. It depicts, according to *The Washington Post*, "whip-wielding band members lounging around an S&M dungeon surrounded by topless wenches with rouged nipples."

Dick Armey supporters were not exactly saddened by **Bill Paxon**'s decision to retire. "We're doing our little victory dance," one

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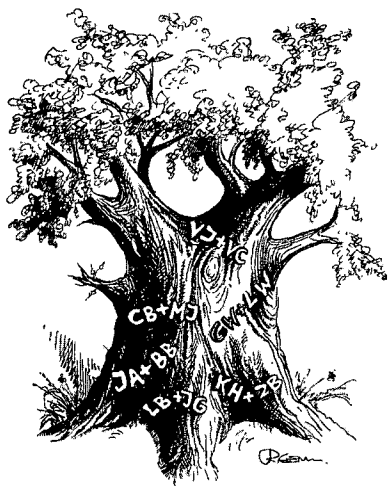
itating the ability of ordinary people to act together *in the marketplace* in the face of larger opposing interests. Not all (or even most) market-power enhancing combinations will be "government" — but there will still be some problems that purely "private" arrangements will be unable, or unwilling, to address.

Allowing anyone to buy into FEHBP, then, may not just encourage a lower-priced, more-competitive health insurance market for all Americans. It may also mark what Bush White House adviser James Pinkerton has called "The Big Offer": a revised conception of government's role that addresses the new needs of the vast majority of people. And that could help cure more than just our health-care problems. ●

told *The Washington Post.* "He's a guy who would lie to your face and stab you in the back."

How did **Hillary Clinton** react to the first news about **Bill** and **Monica**? We don't really know for sure. Our only source is the *American Spectator*, which has never gone out of its way to be kind to the president and his wife. But for what it's worth, here's what they say. "She first heard about it from news clips and **Roberta Green**" (her deputy chief of staff) just before leaving the White House to catch a train to Baltimore where she was to speak at Goucher College. She was described as "chilly and withdrawn." She refused to take three phone calls from the president, according to the *Spectator*'s informant. "The only sign of emotion we saw was when it was reported on Friday that one of the gifts her husband gave to **Lewinsky** was the **Walt Whitman** book, *Leaves of Grass.* She looked shaken and said, 'He gave me the same book on our second date.'"

Remember when CBS was accused of helping arrange an invasion of Haiti so it could be first with the news? ABC may be trying to get into the act. It develops, according to **Stephen Labaton** of *The New York Times*, that **Brian Ross** of "ABC News" took a Cameroon businessman named **Laurent Yene** to the Justice Department and introduced him to an official there so Yene could make charges against Secretary of Labor **Alexis Herman**. Then Ross broke the news of the charges on ABC.



ART BY ROMAN GENN

Paula Jones has become a pioneer in the new science of recovered memory. She now recalls that, when she was leaving that Little Rock hotel room, **Bill Clinton** stopped her from opening the door. The memory of this event, and of several others that help make her legal case, had, *The Washington Post* points out, escaped her until recently.

When **George Stephanopolous** mentioned that the White House might retaliate against journalists who have been a tad severe about **Bill Clinton**'s sexual adventures by leaking news of adulteries involving members of the press corps, **Maureen Dowd** expressed outrage at the possibility in her column in *The New York Times*, outrage that was shared by many members of the media community. For good reason. In just a few minutes my colleagues here were able to come up with a list of notable illicit relationships that have been rumored since this magazine was founded in 1969. For discretion's sake, we'll only give initials: **C.B.** and **M.J.**, **B.B.** and **S.Q.**, **J.A.** and **B.B.**, **M.G.** and **P.G.**, **G.W.** and **L.W.**, **B.W.** and **E.W.**, **F.B.** and **Z. S.**, **K.H.** and **Z.B.**, **V.J.** and **V.C.**, **M.D.** and **E.T.**, **R.C.** and **K.M.**, **L.D.** and **J.G.**

The list includes prominent editors, bureau chiefs, and columnists. In one case, the only journalist involved was the victimized husband, but in all the others at least one party was a journalist. In most cases the indiscretions were accompanied by a fib or two, and sometimes more, the memory of which, we hope, will encourage the participants in the merciful forgiveness of sinners.

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Out of Sight, Out of Mind

New York City's new homeless policy

BY EVAN HALPER
AND STEPHANIE MCCRUMMEN

THE VAN MOVED SWIFTLY ACROSS New York City as Princess Brown looked out of the window into darkness, clutching her two-year-old daughter, Ariel. No one told her where they were being driven. A nameless man had woken them earlier from a fitful sleep on hard plastic benches of a South Bronx warehouse ironically known as the Emergency Assistance Unit, the registration center for the city's family shelter system. There, Brown had been interrogated multiple times about her personal life, where she came from, her nearest relatives, and why she was there. In hostile and unfamiliar surroundings, she had been too scared to eat, too scared even to go to the washroom. At long last, the (still nameless) man had ordered her into the van without explanation. It was a sweltering June evening, near midnight, and Ariel was hungry.

An hour passed as others in the van were dropped off one by one. Brown and her daughter were the last, and the driver finally told her where she was: Flatlands, a decrepit city-run shelter in outermost Brooklyn. There was no food that first night, but more than anything, Brown remembers the smell of her room — a wretched stench unlike anything she ever experienced. No amount of cleaning could get rid of it, she says, and no amount of cleaning could ward off the rats that scurried across the floors and countertops.

Eight months later, having been shuffled from Flatlands to a privately run shelter called St. John's, Brown is still waiting for a Section 8 voucher from the city's housing department that will subsidize her family's move out. But here's the best part: While Princess Brown waits, the city is paying an average of $2,400 a month in rent to keep her sequestered within the shelter system. This same amount could fetch a chic Fifth Avenue sublet or a three-bedroom apartment in one of New York's outer boroughs. Princess Brown, of course, desires nothing so regal. She simply wants help obtaining a modest apartment for herself, her daughter, and the new baby who arrived in January — seven months into her shelter stay. This is something the government could provide at easily a third of the cost of putting her up at St. John's. But in the new New York City, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani prefers that Princess Brown wait months or even years in a transitional shelter before she is even considered for permanent housing subsidies. The mayor's decision has almost nothing to do with economics — and almost everything to do with politics.

Keep Out

Transitional shelters are intended to be a step up from makeshift shelters of the past, providing social services and rooms for those awaiting public housing. Typically consisting of converted hotel rooms, 82 of these "tier II shelters" make up the New York City shelter system for homeless families. Most are run by nonprofit agencies, such as the American Red Cross or Homes for the Homeless, and provide services like job training, parenting classes, and day care. The assumption, which mirrors the federal Housing Department's "Continuum of Care" initiative, is that the homeless need more than just an affordable apartment.

This arrangement is admittedly a significant improvement over the days when the homeless were crammed into school gymnasiums or the lobbies of office buildings. But even staff members working in the best of the shelters complain that families today are getting stuck there far longer than they need to as

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the housing bureaucracy lumbers along. Five thousand families are currently doing time in this system. The average shelter stay: 298 days. As of Feb. 1, Brown was at day 282, and still waiting on the city to produce a piece of paper proving she is pregnant with the child she gave birth to months ago.

As hard as it is to move out of the shelters, getting into them is almost as tough. The tier II system doesn't have enough space to house even 2 percent of the 300,000 poor New York City families who lack their own living space. When a court decision forced the city to ease crowding at the Bronx Emergency Assistance Unit — where families sleep on benches while the city decides whether they are legitimately homeless — the administration responded by beefing up anti-fraud and "diversion" efforts. Investigators now routinely force families back to the overcrowded apartments of relatives where they had been sleeping on the floor. (According to St. John's caseworker Elaine Young, one woman, Akeeba Allen, has been rejected by the EAU 55 times.) Diversion efforts have become so overzealous that many women and children are being returned to abusive situations, prompting a damning report last spring by the Public Advocate's office.

The Giuliani administration, however, doesn't seem particularly troubled. "There's a feeling out there that people are taking advantage of the system," says an official at the city's Department of Homeless Services. "All we're trying to say to people is we've sorted it out, we've put everybody on equal footing." Since Giuliani took office in '92, spending on fraud investigation has *tripled* and the number of families turned away from the shelter system has jumped from three to nearly 8,000.

So, in a way, Brown was lucky even to make it into a shelter. But now that she's in, she'll have to wait — in part because the city mandates a minimum three-month stay in tier II shelters, and in part because the process of obtaining a subsidized apartment is unavoidably slow. There are 400,000 eligible families on waiting lists for housing subsidies, most living in severely overcrowded and unstable conditions. At the current turnover rate, it would take approximately 56 years to empty the waiting lists.

Money, of course, is part of the problem. Although HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo recently upped his budget request, years of cuts in federal funding for housing subsidies have exacerbated the crunch. The most devastating cut was HUD's decision three years ago to stop issuing new Section 8 rental subsidies. Until 1995, New York City had been getting up to 5,000 new vouchers annually. Now it must wait for existing vouchers to be freed up when a recipient dies or moves on.

But tight finances cannot explain away all of the problem. Mayor Giuliani has balked at using discretionary federal dollars to fill the funding gap with local initiatives. What's more, budget analysts and city council members have raised questions about millions of local dollars budgeted for Department of Homeless Services that have gone unspent. In the fiscal years since Giuliani took office, over $170 million has gone unaccounted for, according to the Independent Budget Office, a nonpartisan monitoring agency. For instance, an additional $1.2 million was allocated in the past two years for the city's new Rental Assistance Program (RAP), but no vouchers have been administered yet. The department's commissioner, Gordon Campbell, has claimed the supposed surplus was spoken for by creditors, but the budget office says its figures account for outstanding checks.

And even as the mayor refuses to commit money to long-term housing solutions, he continues to spend millions on temporary, emergency programs that simply keep homeless families out of sight. The very welfare hotels that Giuliani declared the scourge of previous administrations remain in full operation under the guise of "specialized residences." (The addition of a hotplate is usually sufficient to earn the redesignation.) Recalling scenes from local news exposés of the 1980s, each night a van full of homeless families from the EAU are dropped at hotels such as the King's Inn next to La Guardia Airport, which charges the city $75 a night per room. The hotels are meant as a way station between the EAU and the transitional shelters, while homeless families are under investigation. According to the mayor's own statistics, 848 homeless families go to these hotels every day, typically for a period of 10 days. The daily cost to the city: $60,000.

As the money burns, Giuliani seems paralyzed by a fear of the conventional solutions. He considers housing subsidies a scary, uncontrollable pyramid scheme in which people who get vouchers hold on to them for their entire lives, and more and more are needed. He has a point: With only a 5 percent turnover rate, people are continually applying to the Section 8 voucher program for the homeless — known as the Emergency Assistance Rehousing Program (EARP) — while practically no one is leaving it. Instead of searching for new solutions, however, the mayor's strategy has been simply to erect barriers to the existing system, making it as difficult, frustrating, and time-consuming to access as possible.

For starters, obtaining eligibility for housing assis-

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tance is no mean feat. The ordeal Princess Brown underwent at the EAU is just step one. Next, before someone can even apply for one of the city's housing programs, he or she must go on public assistance, whether they need it or not. Carla McDonald, director of social services at St. John's, recalls that one woman who earned $30,000 a year spent months at the shelter waiting to become eligible for public assistance just so she could apply for subsidized housing. "The way they've tightened the system is not helpful to anybody," says McDonald, who has worked with homeless families for eight years. "The worst part is becoming eligible."

But even for those who make it through the eligibility gauntlet, locating actual housing is equally daunting. At present, the city is actually narrowing the housing options available to its homeless. One traditional venue for the system has been units owned by the department of Housing Preservation and Development. In 1996, the department supplied 1,219 apartments for that purpose. This year, it plans to supply only 220. Moreover, the Giuliani administration has been spear-heading initiatives to sell city-owned buildings to private companies.

What's more, even the housing that remains available is often impossible to access, thanks to bureaucratic roadblocks. Currently, 2,700 vouchers set aside for those deemed officially homeless remain unused. Shelter residents seeking EARP get a weekly listing from the city of apartments to call. But the list is essentially worthless. "They send us the same list month after month with little changes," says Walston Bobb-Semple, a housing counselor at St. John's. The Nov. 17 list from the city looked promising enough, with 657 apartments to choose from, along with a cover letter from the Housing Authority assuring prospective renters that all but the 257 units marked were still available. The letter further promised that "phone calls were made to landlords of all apartments to determine whether the apartment was still available." Calls in November to just the first five ostensibly available listings, however, yielded two disconnected lines, a fax machine, and a frustrated broker, Roger Watson. "Fulton Avenue has been gone for a year and a half and yet it is *still* on the list," he reported. "I'm getting calls even this month for that apartment."

A broker for All Glory Real Estate, Watson works to match homeless families in the voucher program with landlords who accept vouchers. Perhaps as well as anyone, Watson knows what a cumbersome process prying vouchers loose from the city machinery can be. "I have a house to rent to EARP — an entire house," he says. "The people signed up and accepted the house over seven weeks ago, and we're still waiting on a registration number." These kinds of hassles make landlords understandably less than eager to deal with voucher tenants. Government subsidies used to be attractive to landlords, says Watson, but no more. "That's why people on EARP are not getting a place to live — because [landlords] are not going to waste time dealing with this situation," he says, adding that he won't deal with the program any more either. "If they could speed up the system it would be beneficial to many, many families."

Giuliani's orchestrated attempt to keep the housing bureaucracy running as poorly as possible has gone largely unreported by New York City media. The mayor, who has all but handcuffed reporters trying to cover him, seems to have a policy against discussing this particular issue. Reporters who direct questions to staff at the Department of Homeless Services get a perfunctory response: Call the press office. But under the Giuliani administration, municipal press officers are reluctant to give even a prefabricated schpiel to reporters. They rarely call back. (The department official quoted in this article took three weeks to return calls.) Even obtaining a simple budget can be a monumental task. The last one on file at the municipal library — the clearinghouse for city information — is from 1993. The librarian there noted that, since Giuliani took over, documents just haven't been coming in.

A Policy of Neglect

Ironically, Mayor Giuliani has himself to thank for many of the housing problems his administration now faces. The current wave of homelessness and overcrowding in New York is in part the result of a consistent pattern of housing cuts at both the federal and municipal level. In the 1980s, New York City invested heavily in the construction of affordable housing. Billions were spent rebuilding once-blighted areas. Single family homes now line Charlotte Street in the South Bronx — a former wasteland of rubble and burned-out buildings — as a monument to urban renewal. But even as the national media celebrated this success, Giuliani quietly cut funding for new housing construction almost in half. While his predecessor spent $2.4 billion on housing in the four-year budget period ending in 1993, Giuliani's budget for the four-year period ending in 2000 calls for only $1.27 billion. "The city no longer develops," said Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer at a recent public forum. "That's been a fact of life for four years."

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Sadly, New York is not alone. In cities across the country, the Reagan-era debacle is resurfacing as rents go up, federal funding dwindles, and the working poor see a greater percentage of their income going to rent — in New York City, a quarter of the population spends 75 percent of their income on housing. A 15-city survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors in December reported a 64 percent increase in emergency shelter requests by families. In Los Angeles, 90 percent of those requests have gone unmet; in Phoenix, 52 percent. In many of these cities, including New York, the government's solution has been to narrow eligibility requirements to keep families from flooding shelters.

But no real solutions are likely to emerge in the Big Apple as long as the mayor refuses to acknowledge that his current policy only superficially addresses (and essentially avoids) the problem. When pressed on the dismal state of homeless services or the lack of a coherent affordable housing plan, the administration's pat response is that you never see a homeless family on the streets in New York. But just because the city's voters and tourists don't have to watch children begging on Madison Avenue doesn't mean officials should dismiss the very real failures of the housing system — the nightmare of the EAU, the rats in city-run shelters, the overcrowded and dangerous living conditions for the thousands on Section 8 waiting lists. Nor is attempting to make the system so difficult to navigate that the homeless will simply give up and go away an appropriate response to fears about vouchers becoming an ever-expanding welfare entitlement. The mayor's concerns about the long-term dependence on housing subsidies is a legitimate one, but this situation too is in part the result of poor policy planning. In a city where 25 percent of residents spend a stunning three-fourths of their income on rent, an administration concerned with something other than its short-term political fortunes should be expending at least an equal effort to address its affordable housing crisis as to shuffle its undesirables out of the public eye. Of course, the former approach requires considerably more long-term planning and political and financial commitment than the latter.

On the other hand, says Ralph Nunez, president of Homes for the Homeless, "Who cares about it? The public? You guys?" Nunez, who was a commissioner of homeless services under former Mayor Edward Koch, believes the issue of homelessness is dead. "We've played it out," he says matter-of-factly. "We took the homeless in the 1980's and turned them into idols. Now, the public is fed up — they don't care because they never see them on the street."

And that's just the way Mayor Rudy likes it.

FOLLOW IN FAMOUS FOOTSTEPS ...

The *Monthly* is seeking applicants for spring/summer interns. Internships involve all aspects of magazine production, business, writing, editing, and design, and are unpaid. Past interns have gone on to careers at *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Newsweek*, *The New Republic*, *Slate*, the State Department, and the White House. Applicants should send a cover letter, resumé, and writing samples to: Kathleen Nuccetelli, *The Washington Monthly*, 1611 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20009, or fax us at 202/332-8413.

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NEW NIXON TAPES SHOW THAT PRESIDENT WAS IN THE DARK ABOUT WATERGATE COVER-UP

New Nixon White House tapes, released in November 1996 thanks to a dramatic compromise by the Nixon family and estate, show that President Nixon was as much in the dark about the Watergate break-in and cover-up as he said during the scandal, according to an analysis by a Nixon insider published in the March 1998 issue of the *American Spectator.*

John H. Taylor, the former President's chief aide between 1984-90 and now director of the Nixon Library and co-executor of the late President's estate, also argues that anti-Nixon scholars' and journalists' commentary on the new tapes have been skewed by their lingering anti-Vietnam War biases.

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What One Doctor Learned

Going from policy making to caring for real patients at an inner-city clinic

BY DR. FITZHUGH MULLAN

I HAVE DEDICATED MY CAREER TO THE U.S. health-care system. For 23 years, I served as a physician in the United States Public Health Service. During that quarter century, from Nixon to Clinton, from erythromycin for Legionnaire's Disease to protease inhibitors for AIDS, I was fortunate to serve in a series of interesting jobs, albeit ones that took me steadily into the realm of policy and away from patients. Starting out in 1972 as a physician in the National Health Service Corps in New Mexico, I came to Washington several years later and had the opportunity to run the program during the Carter administration. Subsequently, I worked at the NIH, served on the staff of Surgeon General Koop, and, in recent years, directed the federal Bureau of Health Professions.

I joined the Public Health Service believing that government service was important work, and I left it with the same conviction. But over the years, the growing anti-government sentiment and the increasing privatization of our health-care system made me wonder. Had the legacy of the government, the public collective, as the ultimate guarantor of medical care been supplanted by market forces and proprietary medicine? Two years ago, I left government to find out.

Today, I am an inner-city doctor working at the Upper Cardozo Community Health Center at 14th and Irving Streets in Washington, D.C. — a federally assisted, privately run, community-governed medical clinic. Our neighborhood is made up of a large Central American community, a Vietnamese enclave, an African-American population scattered throughout the region, and a mixture of refugees, legal immigrants, and illegal immigrants struggling to find someone to treat them despite their lack of money and insurance. I have seen Ethiopians, Somalis, Kurds, West Africans, Chinese, Afghanistanis, and Bosnians. Less than a quarter of our patients have Medicaid, almost none have private health insurance, and all are poor. Medical life for our patients — like their lives in general — is not easy.

I chose to work at Cardozo because, having practiced inner-city medicine before, I knew that I liked it, and I knew that I was needed. Moreover, I wanted to see for myself what the forces of medical privatization meant for our poorest citizens and neighborhoods. In my time back on the front lines, I have relearned some lessons that I had forgotten during my years in government — lessons about the vital role government still plays in health care, and lessons about how it could contribute more.

Disconnected

The majority of patients at Cardozo are "self pay" — meaning they have no insurance, no money, and can pay little or nothing. Put differently, if the Cardozo health center didn't continue to receive several million dollars a year of federal funding based on the vintage 1960's Office of Economic Opportunity idea of a community health center, there would be no payroll, no receptionists, no nurses, no doctors, and no medical care. Grants for the treatment of AIDS

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and the homeless as well as the Women, Infant and Childrens (WIC) Program round out the budget at Cardozo. Government funding remains the operative principle of health care finance in our neighborhood. Without the programs legislated and managed by the federal government, there would be no medical care at 14th and Irving. The commercial market hasn't found our patients and doesn't seem to be looking for them.

Practice at Upper Cardozo isn't for everyone. It is neither glamorous nor lucrative (a not insignificant deterrent to young people who may have run up serious debts in pursuit of their medical education). In clinics like ours, much of the staff — like much of the funding — comes courtesy of the federal government. Two of the top-notch pediatricians I work with are products of government sponsorship: the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. The Loan Repayment Program provides debt reduction for clinicians who commit to work in underserved areas, while the military medical school trains a certain number of Public Health Service physicians who then do their military duty in settings such as Cardozo. My colleagues at the clinic, and others like them, are superb examples of what government incentives can do to move doctors into settings they might not otherwise choose or be able to afford.

Unfortunately, the recruitment, education, orientation, and socialization of doctors working in poor communities remains an important but neglected mission over which the government has more power than it has chosen to use. Currently, there are about 1,300 physicians serving in the National Health Service Corps — less than one-quarter of 1 percent of the physicians in America. At its current level, this is a demonstration program only and not a serious strategy to end medical disenfranchisement in the United States. But the program shows that linking community medical service to educational opportunities is a powerful and proven idea that needs to be bankrolled with a much more generous budget that will draw many more physicians to work in an area of undisputed national need. Government programs that work need to be expanded — and this is one of them.

The government has a right (and a responsibility) to demand more for its money. Few people know that the largest single government program of funding for medical education is the $7 billion a year that Medicare pays to hospitals with residency programs. These hospitals, however, tend to focus on specialist-heavy, hospital-based training — meaning that this huge injection of public money does little to get doctors into communities where they are most needed and where they can learn primary care and community-oriented medicine first-hand. Recent changes in the Medicare law have finally eliminated provisions that actually *discouraged* hospitals from allowing residents to practice with private physicians or in community health centers, but the law still does nothing to encourage or reward these important, formative medical experiences. The message here is straightforward: We need doctors to go where the problems are, and our public dollars should be managed in a fashion that rewards community-based training and practice.

Finally, I have been struck by the lack of communication and coordination among government-funded organizations with similar or complementary goals. Programs of public support in sectors such as education, social services, or even the police are another world to me. Each of us resides within our own silo. I have visited the local high school, many of whose students come to Cardozo as patients. The principal and I, understandably, have a lot in common — worries about teen pregnancy and sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, immunization status, and health literacy. Yet we continue to live in separate worlds, one block apart, both funded by agencies of government but with little in the way of incentives to bring our enterprises closer together. We need that push. Government funding needs to battle the tendency of all programs to become narrow and self-centered by making dollars and people available at the local level in a way that requires community-based programs to work cooperatively. Smart public funding should pull community programs together, resisting the ever present drift toward parochialism.

The Leaky Lifeboat

My time back in practice has led me to the inescapable conclusion that health-care reform has *not* happened. Despite what pundits say, the managed-care explosion has not brought any relief to the medical problems of the inner city. The mission of government and government workers remains critical to medical care and life in such areas. Sadly, my concerns about the unevenness and unfairness of the medical system in the United States are not just paleoliberal gripes. Whatever the advances in the health-care system, the government rather than "the market" still stands as the only Samaritan with the

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resources and the license to do something about the underserved.

When I sit in my windowless office at Cardozo, it amazes me to think that I am less than two miles from the Old Executive Office Building conference room, where I spent the better part of 100 days serving on the President's Task Force on Health Care Reform. I can remember looking out of the window of that room at the West Wing of the White House and thinking that I felt the pulse of history. My office at Cardozo offers no such views or sensations. What it does provide, however, is a clear sense of people and their pains, the world at ground level without distractions or camouflage.

During my years in government, I forgot how complicated life can be in a poor community. From the deck of the great ship of state, programs of medical or social support are developed and cast overboard into the community like so many lifelines — each with its own buoy and a rope of trailing eligibilities, requirements, and provisos. Viewed from the deck, each lifeline is logical, coherent, and well intended. Viewed from the water, the lifelines often tangle, get thrown in the wrong direction, or support some members of a family while leaving others to drown.

Now back at the water level, I am acutely aware of the quandaries created by programs that, despite their excellent intent, are poorly coordinated, overlapping, or ignorant of other initiatives affecting the same people or community. Under the current welfare law, for instance, undocumented immigrants with children born in the United States can enroll those children in Medicaid, but they run the risk of putting their own names on deportation lists by doing so. When the D.C. Medicaid authority awarded its initial contracts for Medicaid managed care, they bypassed Cardozo and the city's other federally supported community health center. Cardozo had to go to court to get a piece of the action and prevent its publicly supported budget from being driven further into the red.

Government doesn't always make the right decisions but it makes important ones. Amidst all the clamor about "the American Century" and the triumph of capitalism, about managed care and the market place, it is the people working in government who run the programs that make medical care at Cardozo possible. They need to keep a vision of an active and compassionate government, but they also need to come and visit us occasionally and see the world from the waterline.

The Washington Monthly *Journalism Award*

FEBRUARY 1998

EDWARD G. SHIRLEY

"Can't Anybody Play This Game?"

Atlantic Monthly

Despite accusations of staggering inefficiency, illegal involvement, and acts of abuse and discrimination, the CIA still resists reform. Edward Shirley, who resigned as an agent in the Near East Division in 1993, claims that the agency is marred by a largely unqualified senior staff, sloppy fieldwork, and a rising resignation rate among the best agents, who are disgusted with the system. He points out that senior officials are better at producing cover-ups for their mistakes than at handling delicate operations.

MARTYN BURKE AND JAMIE MALANOWSKI

"The Pentagon Wars"

HBO

This program, which ran on Feb. 28, is a somewhat fictionalized but essentially true portrayal of a whistleblower's struggle to expose and correct dangerous flaws in the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, which was developed by the Army in the 1980s as a cross between a tank and a personnel carrier. The combination of missions promised problems, and the whistleblower found them.

Correction: The January Monthly Journalism Award for Melvin Claxton and William Gaines' "Loopholes Give Weapons New Life" was wrongly attributed to *The Washington Times*. The *Times* story was picked up from *The Chicago Tribune*, where the co-authors are on staff.

THE MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including two copies of the article or broadcast text) to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Nominations for stories run in March are due April 2.

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THE WALTER WINCHELL OF THE ELITES

The triumph of celebrityism in high-brow America

BY PIPER MONROE

WHEREVER HE IS TODAY, Walter Winchell must be positively pea green with envy. A pioneer in the field of celebrity journalism in the 1930s, Winchell gave John and Jane Q. Public the inside skinny on the stars of the society, sports, and entertainment worlds and was among the first to lump that new elite together. But Winchell plied his craft in an era when, although the general public devoured his work, the cultural and intellectual elite never paid him much attention. Name dropping and celebrity gossip sold, but it didn't win you much respect.

Today, all that has changed. No longer must one choose between the labels of scandalmonger and serious writer. And as the cult of celebrity informs every rung of the social, economic, and cultural ladder, the line between achievement and acclaim has been pretty much dissolved: comedienne Roseanne Barr can guest edit *The New Yorker* and actor Rick Moranis' prose can appear on the op-ed pages of *The New York Times.*

But perhaps nowhere has the new status of celebrity journalism been better illustrated than in the reception of the most recent novel by *Vanity Fair* contributor Dominick Dunne. *Another City, Not My Own* is a fictionalized account of the O.J. Simpson trial as told by the author's alter-ego, Gus Bailey. Though subtitled *A Novel in the Form of a Memoir*, more than a few reviewers have made the obvious observation that *Another City* is, in fact, the exact opposite — a thinly veiled, mostly true look at Dunne's personal experiences covering the Simpson trial. And, more specifically, all of the A-list celebrities he sat around gossiping with in the course of his reporting.

"Dunne's antennae are always tuned to the offbeat story ... He is magazine journalism's ace social anthropologist whose area of social study is the famous and infamous up close and personal." — *San Francisco Examiner*

In simpler times, an "anthropologist" such as Dunne would have been called a gossip columnist. Far less interested in "'what" than "who," Dunne's book is a study in strategic name-dropping — no connection to O.J. is too tangential if a person's star power is bright enough. And, not surprisingly, with the notable exception of the author, none of the names have been changed to protect the innocent:

> Whoopi Goldberg said to Gus when he kissed her on the cheek in greeting, "Gus, this is awful about O.J. I can't stop thinking about it." She shook her head in sadness. Harrison Ford, who before he became a star had once done construction work on the house that Gus' brother Malachy and his wife, Edwina, rebuilt in Malibu, said he knew Simpson. "I mean, I met him a couple of times, at closed-circuit games and boxing matches, stuff like that. I didn't really know him." Robert DeNiro and Francis Ford Coppola were telling stories about O.J. Simpson. Michael Eisner, the CEO of Disney, said, "O.J. just did a television pilot called 'Frogman' for NBC."

Though Dunne makes a modest effort to work the names casually into the prose, at times all pretense at narrative must be abandoned to achieve maximum name density:

"You get more messages than anyone in the hotel,"

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said Mario Maldonado as he handed Gus a fistful of messages at the front desk. Mary Jane Stevenson of "Court TV" and Shoreen Maghame of *City News*. Reunion of the Menendez reporters at Orso on Third Street Friday night. Mrs. Marvin Davis, dinner for Placido Domingo. Linda Deutsch of Associated Press, lunch at the Beverly Hills Hotel on Sunday with Elaine Young, the Beverly Hills realtor, and Theo Wilson, the great crime reporter. Janet DeCordova, dinner at Chasen's Sunday night. The Billy Wilders would be coming. Mart Crowley, dinner at Orso. Martin Manulis, dinner at Morton's. Tita Cahn, dinner at her home.

"He is one of those writers who seems effortlessly to collide with copy. Movie stars confide to his answering machine. Wanted men hail the same taxi. Heiresses unload their life stories in elevators." — *Tina Brown*

Whatever one thinks of Dunne's approach to writing, one of the most striking things about it is its embrace by the same elite that once scorned the Winchells of this world. Such acceptance is perhaps best illustrated by *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, and of course *Vanity Fair* lining up to weigh in on the value of *Another City* as both prose and social commentary. While the reviews were not entirely positive, the fact that Dunne has reached the point where such high-brow publications, as a service to their A-list readerships, feel compelled to address his work gives it the stamp of elite legitimacy.

Dunne's exalted position in the media world is something he also takes pains to share in his book. While hanging out with other (perhaps more serious) reporters isn't as eye-catching as dining out with Liz Taylor, it does let readers know you are, in every way, in the loop.

> Gus liked to have dinner with the reporters so that they could spend the whole time talking about the case. David Margolick of *The New York Times* and he went to Cicada. Shirley Perlman of *Newsday* and he went to Morton's. Harvey Levin of KCBS and Pat Lalama of "Hard Copy" went to Eclipse. That night, he went to dinner at Drai's with Dan Abrams, the young commentator on the Simpson trial for "Court TV."

Being sought after for media appearances, however, is an entirely different matter, significantly enhancing one's celebrity cachet: "That evening, after taping a segment for 'Rivera Live,' Gus was in his suite . . . ." or: "'We watch you [Gus] on Larry King and Dan Rather.'" or: "'I'm going to be on 'Good Morning America' and we go on the air at 4 a.m., so I have to get back to the hotel ...' said Gus." or: "'I go on Michael Jackson's radio show several times a week.'"

"He knows every story there is to tell, precisely how it happened, and why." — *The New York Times Book Review*

For one who embraces the cult of celebrity, part of the goal — and the payoff — is achieving celebrity status yourself. The true measure of Dunne's worth then is how many of the beautiful people recognize him as one of them. Conveying this importance within the confines of a narrative can pose something of a challenge. Sometimes it can be achieved through stilted dialogue:

> "I'll be going out there myself; I can't remember exactly when," she said. "Harry's publishing Gore Vidal's memoirs, and we're going to give a party for Gore at L'Orangerie. You know Gore, don't you?" "Do I know Gore? When I was twenty years old, I met Anais Nin at Gore's house in Guatemala, and she took me away with her to Acapulco. Top that!" said Gus.

or:

> Gus loved to talk about old times. "Do you remember that night in Rome when Elizabeth [Taylor] got so furious at Andy [Warhol] when she discovered he had a tape recorder hidden under her mink coat on the banquette and was recording every word she said?"

or:

> "Do you remember that lunch that Franco Zeffirelli gave at the house on the Via Appia Antica, and Hiram Keller shocked all the titles when he jumped in the pool nude?"

At other times, the description of an actual event is manipulated to highlight the magnitude of the author's A-list status:

> Gus moved on into the room. He shook hands with Liz Tilberis, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. He hugged his friend Jesse Kornbluth, the writer, on whom he had based the character of Bernie Slatkin, who married and then divorced the richest girl in New York in his book *People Like Us*. He posed for a picture for his friend Heather Cohane, who was the editor of *Quest*. He kissed Fran Lebowitz, the honoree, on both cheeks, complimented her on her tuxedo, and got her to sign his book.

"[Dominick] Dunne is a genius." — *Newsday*

Perhaps the ultimate triumph of Dunne's book is the paper-thin layer of irony he weaves into his glamourfest. "I'm not really the celebrity hound I seem," his prose winks knowingly, "but isn't it fun to play along?" And alongside the winks, of course, there's the veiled threat: If you don't play along, you're a humorless Puritan. To their shame, much of our intelligentsia has flocked to Dunne's whispers. ●

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Class of '94: The Morning After

Why the Republican Revolution didn't pan out

By Eleanor Clift

THE FRESHMEN: What Happened to the Republican Revolution?
By Linda Killian
Westview Press, $28

POLLS SHOWED THE WORDS most associated with them were "mean," "extreme," and "arrogant." But that didn't deter the 73 Republicans elected in 1994 from their kamikaze mission to end government as we have known it. Linda Killian, in her exhaustively reported book, *The Freshmen: What Happened to the Republican Revolution?*, observes that this class of lawmakers took "perverse pride in being called Visigoths." The abuse heaped upon them by the voters, the media, and their own leadership in Congress served only to spur them on to greater excesses.

I thought that reading this inside account of the freshmen, their hopes and dreams, would kindle some sympathy within me, if not for their cause, for their sincerity. Killian accomplishes her goal "to get inside their heads." But what she finds there does nothing to alter the collective image of the '94 GOP freshmen as a bunch of narrow-minded, partisan prigs. "Poor people aren't our constituency," one freshman nonchalantly explained as the Republicans axed programs affecting the poor while leaving corporate subsidies and tax breaks virtually untouched. Rewarded by the special interests they protected, the freshmen raised so much money for their re-election that Ann McBride, president of Common Cause, remarked that they had "come to shake Washington up," but instead "they stayed to shake it down."

Ask anybody with any common sense and they will tell you that shutting down the government for three weeks in 1995 was a mistake, a big mistake. Ask one of the hard-core GOP freshmen, and you'll get a different answer: It was their proudest moment. "They even said they would be happy to do it again," Killian writes. But the government shutdown proved to be the turning point that derailed the vaunted Republican Revolution. The freshmen blamed Newt Gingrich for losing his nerve, and the Speaker in turn threatened no fewer than four times to resign during those rocky months if the unruly freshmen did not fall into line. He had done more than any single human being to create the Republican wave that captured Congress in 1994, but like a modern-day Dr. Frankenstein, Gingrich's experiment had gone wildly awry. "Gingrich created me .... We are him," said Indiana Rep. Mark Souder, one of the True Believers. Dubbed by the media "Newt's ninnies," the freshmen were supposed to serve as Gingrich's shock troops. "But they were even more lethal because they were Gingrich with much less to lose," says Killian. The freshmen made politics more partisan and more viciously personal. They flouted the old adage, followed by President Ronald Reagan and Democratic Speaker Tip O'Neill, that political warfare ends at dusk when the cocktail hour begins. Many of the freshmen refused to attend the White House Christmas party because of their intense dislike of President Clinton.

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As a former beat reporter, my hat is off to Killian for a prodigious reporting job. It's not her fault that what she found behind the scenes mostly amplifies what we already knew about the freshmen. Living through their antics was bad enough. Reliving the infighting over term limits and such arcana as "the Istook amendment" requires a special fortitude. It's a little like being stranded on a desert island with two years' worth of *Roll Call*, the earnest Capitol Hill biweekly that tracks the inner workings of Congress. Man cannot live by facts alone! Maybe that's why I welcomed the "Enid and Joe" and "We Got You Babe" chapters recounting the experiences of two of the more colorful members of the freshman class. Songster Sonny Bono didn't take the endless debates all that seriously, and he delighted in shocking his more sanctimonious colleagues. After a particularly contentious all-nighter about foreign aid, Killian reports that a bleary-eyed Bono approached a small group of members on the House floor and declared, "I've never been up this late unless I was getting pussy."

Then there's Enid Greene, a devout Mormon and rising star in Republican politics who hooks up with Joe Waldholtz, a political operative from Pittsburgh. Waldholtz suffers from grandiosity and proceeds to help Greene ruin her life. This is pure soap opera. We learn that Enid's mother, whom Joe called the "Reich chancellor," slept in her daughter's bedroom during Enid's first unsuccessful campaign for Congress to guard against any possibility that Joe might make an inappropriate advance. When the couple married a year later, Utah's political and religious elite turned out for the ceremony, which featured the same music used by Princess Diana and Prince Charles. Talk about bad luck. The marriage was viewed as the official kickoff for Enid's second and ultimately successful campaign for Congress. The couple reveled in their extravagant lifestyle. Even their pet boxer drank Perrier. What makes these salacious details relevant is the common denominator of excessive and, as it turned out, illegally gotten money. Enid Greene Waldholtz's political career ended in a five-hour flood of tears after it was revealed that she had spent $2 million of her father's money to win her congressional seat — a blatant violation of campaign funding laws.

Maybe it's unfair to focus on a few bad apples in a freshman class as large as this one. Thanks to the good sense of the American voters, the worst have been weeded out. Wes Cooley of Oregon, who lied about his military service during the Korean War, was photographed giving the finger to members of the Sierra Club, a salute that didn't go over well in the environmentally conscious state. And Joe Frisa of New York, who voted to repeal the assault weapons ban, was upset by a political novice, Carolyn McCarthy, whose husband had lost his life in a shooting. Frisa was the sorest of losers. He stiffed his own supporters at an election-night party, abandoned his congressional office during the transition, and ordered his staff to throw away all mail from constituents.

Killian intended her book to be a rounded and sympathetic portrait of a group of people swept into politics, almost accidentally, by the strength of their beliefs. The freshmen she writes about are the antithesis of the calculating, compromising politicians who dominate the Washington establishment. Yet they are not immune to the gamesmanship of politics, and to the visceral need to win re-election. An early debate to fulfill a campaign promise disintegrates into a power struggle. "It is clear this is no longer about term limits," Killian writes. "This is about pride and ambition, about coming out on top, about winning. This is politics." Van Hilleary of Tennessee, an unmemorable legislator who is Killian's main character, her "Everyman," runs negative ads that accuse his Democratic opponent, a former defense attorney and prosecutor, of representing child molesters, drunk drivers, and "even a man accused of attempted murder." Well, yes, Killian notes, that's what defense attorneys do, represent people charged with committing crimes.

Republican moderates took a lot of heat while the freshmen were riding high. New York Rep. Sherwood Boehlert was ostracized for standing and applauding in several places during Clinton's State of the Union speech. Republican women House members complained to Gingrich about the anti-abortion agenda of the conservative freshmen, which had forced numerous votes in their ongoing attempt to curtail abortion rights. The freshmen also tended toward isolationism, another trait that set them apart from their GOP elders. Many of the freshmen had never traveled outside of the U.S., and they arrived in Washington with a rather provincial worldview. Foreign entanglements were regarded as a waste of money. But with the Soviet Union no longer a threat, the search began for a new enemy. For the freshmen, it was big government and anything that smacked of foreign influence. During the summer leading up to the '96 presidential election, the GOP-controlled House passed a measure largely along party lines that declared English the official language of the U.S. The House also had to pass an exemption to allow certain Latin phrases to be used. Chief among them: "E Pluribus Unum." The irony was no doubt lost on the tone-deaf freshmen.

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Foreign Service Daze

A veteran diplomat recalls life in an obscure outpost

By James Gibney

OUR MAN IN BELIZE
By Richard Timothy Conroy
St. Martin Press, $27.50

With its Graham Greenesque title, pastel-colored book jacket, and breezy prose, Richard Conroy's memoirs of Foreign Service life in 1960s British Honduras offer an enjoyable nostalgia trip back to the days when diplomacy still featured prop-driven DC-4s and typewritten dispatches. But based on my latter-day experiences with the State Department, what's most striking about Conroy's recollections is how little the Foreign Service seems to have changed. Roughly four decades, one Cold War, and several dozen State Department reorganization plans after Conroy first took up his tropical post, the day-to-day experiences of an American vice consul — especially in the Third World — remain a bizarre blend of Conrad, Kafka, and the Marx Brothers.

Conroy's story begins with his induction into the Foreign Service by way of jobs in the Social Security Administration and a federal nuclear bomb factory in his native Tennessee. Recruited as part of a larger effort by the State Department to go beyond the then-usual pool of Northeastern elites, Conroy quickly demonstrates that he has the right stuff. When his State Department examiners ask whether he would commit an illegal act to advance the national interest, Conroy replies that he would first find out that he had been "misinformed" about the act's illegality, commit the act, and then slap the highest possible classification on any records of what he had done. Although this anecdote rings a little too cute to my ears, few FSOs would deny that the ability to cover your ass is an essential survival skill.

Moreover, Conroy's depiction of his early days in the department is a classic illustration of what happens when smart people are forced to do dumb things. His first assignment is to reconcile personnel files and pay records in the personnel office. Bored out of their gourds, Conroy and colleagues set up an informal tea house where they spend their days composing limericks and spreading incendiary gossip. (One of the department's longest-running internal laments is that few FSOs are good "managers" — a legitimate concern that involves a complex mismatch between the people it attracts and the people it needs.) But this period is not a total loss: A teahouse patron later helps Conroy by derailing his assignment to Naha, Okinawa, in favor of the more desirable Zurich. Writes Conroy about his time in Switzerland: "If these years were in any way memorable, they were so because the consul general was a lovable alcoholic with a 70-year-old Polish mistress, my immediate superior insisted that all correspondence be prepared in the passive voice, and I had to use elaborate subterfuge to wrest control over the visa section from a local Swiss clerk who had delusions of grandeur." With the exception (perhaps) of the lovable alcoholic consul general, his description deftly distills many a first tour.

Conroy does not tell why he went from Zurich to then-British Honduras (now Belize), which is probably just as well. The State Department's assignment system continues to defy easy explanation, operating more on the basis of personal connections and personnel regulations than any internal logic or guiding intelligence. But as Conroy's new boss makes clear when he welcomes him and his family to "in back of beyond," his assignment probably isn't a reward for good behavior. I don't know what Belize is like today, but Conroy's vivid portrait of its sights, sounds, and smells in 1961 evoked some of my first impressions of Bombay, India, 30 years later, whether the funky hygiene, madcap drivers, or the local tendency to steal gas caps and windshield wipers.

After a shaky recovery from his welcoming cock-

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tail party, Conroy settles in at the tiny, two-person consulate. As the resident "Visa Mon," he sorts through a daily parade of dubious would-be travelers to the United States, including one 26-year old man who "wished to see his daughter graduate from Harvard, which he seemed to think was located in New Orleans." (Three of the top stories that dirt-poor Indian farmers used to give "Visa Wallahs" in Bombay were that they wanted to see: 1) Disneyland; 2) the "White Christmas" festival, usually in Texas; and 3) the Water Goddess, aka the Statue of Liberty.) Conroy also tends to the usual mix of good, bad, and ugly American travelers, keeps loose tabs on Belize's bubbling trade in illegal narcotics and stolen cars, and writes commercial reports that "the State Department had to provide if it was to keep [the Department of] Commerce from sending out its own field representatives." (A turf battle that State ultimately lost with the creation of the Foreign Commercial Service.) And, last but not least, as Conroy hilariously recounts, our man in Belize spends a lot of time at parties and receptions, getting bombed with the zany locals, fishing giant cockroaches out of his soup, and doing some compulsory dancing with the wife of the British Governor General.

Disruption to this more or less happy state of affairs comes in the form of Hurricane Hattie on Oct. 31, 1961. As the storm approaches, Conroy's boss Pruitt heads for the high ground (after first ensuring the safety of his sailboat). Conroy is left to secure the consulate and find shelter for his staff and that of the International Cooperation Administration (now the U.S. Agency for International Development, or AID). When Hattie hits with winds close to 200 miles an hour, it kills 400 people, shreds buildings, and leaves much of Belize covered with mud and without electricity or drinking water. Conroy sends the department the kind of cable that most vice consuls can only dream about: "Consul missing. Have assumed charge. Conroy." The first telegram the department sends back is "Department presumes that in view of the destruction caused by the recent hurricane, there will be no representation functions [i.e., parties] in British Honduras during the recovery period. All unobligated representation funds for this fiscal year therefore withdrawn from post's allotment."

Life lurches back to normal. Conroy returns to his daily rounds, speculating that an enraged Pruitt has spiked his career after hearing about his take-charge telegram. The ICA mission withdraws in the face of bitter complaints from local officials about the U.S. failure to provide adequate post-hurricane aid. The Peace Corps arrives with 15 baby blue Jeeps "full of laughing, nubile couples on their way to who knows what youthful excess." Consul Pruitt leaves. In his place comes the by-the-book Consul Hausley, who lectures Conroy on what he calls his wife's "forward" behavior, noting that "if it was not corrected, it would have to be reflected in my performance report." (Readers will be pleased to know that the conduct of FSO spouses is no longer rated — at least not officially.) Then Conroy himself moves on to his next post in Vienna. Eventually, tired of lugging his piano around the world and dealing with the department's restrictions on his journalist wife's writing, he arranges to go on permanent loan to the Smithsonian, from which he ultimately retires.

Conroy sends the department the kind of cable that most vice consuls can only dream about: "Consul missing. Have assumed charge."

All bureaucracies are by definition doomed to a certain level of absurdity and inefficiency. Moreover, while just about every FSO I know can tell tales similar to Conroy's, mismanaged budget cutbacks — especially at the smaller posts — have largely ended the days when vice consuls sat around swirling their gin and tonics under the ceiling fans. Belize's trade in illegal drugs and stolen cars, for example, has gone from the quaint to the murderous, and at most Third World posts there is more likely to be a shortage of resources than of work. But as the State Department has come under fiscal siege, it must confront the contradiction between the demands of modern diplomacy and the dictates of its still almost-feudal bureaucratic culture. Thus, although it would be foolish to read too much modern-day meaning into Conroy's skillful burlesque of Foreign Service life, it would be just as foolish to ignore the persistence of the mindset behind the snafus and shenanigans that he so ably recounts. ●

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Up From the Ghetto

How a boy from Southeast D.C. made it to the Ivy League

By Timothy Noah

A HOPE IN THE UNSEEN:
An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League
By Ron Suskind
Broadway Books, $25

FOUR YEARS AGO, RON Suskind published an extraordinary account of inner-city life in *The Wall Street Journal.* The angle was simple, but novel: to document the peer pressure and other difficulties faced by a black honors student in a tough ghetto high school where academic success was seen by other students as a betrayal of group identity — an affront to a prevailing culture that disdained any aspiration to rise out of poverty as "acting white."

For his subject, Suskind chose Cedric Jennings, a 16 year-old would-be scientist whose father was a thief and a drug dealer and whose mother, a former welfare recipient, had dedicated most of her adult life to plotting her son's escape from the underclass. The setting was Ballou High School, "the most troubled and violent school in the blighted Southeast corner of Washington, D.C.," an obstacle course where Cedric learned to avoid going to honors assemblies lest the prizes he accept incite violence against him.

The article turned Cedric's plight into a narrative of excruciating suspense: Would Cedric propel himself out of his poisonous environment, or would he fall victim to what's been tagged the "crab bucket syndrome," in which those who show the effrontery to seek escape are dragged back down by jealous peers? At the end of the first newspaper story (a follow-up appeared some months later, and both stories eventually won the Pulitzer prize), Suskind provided a hopeful answer: Cedric, receiving an acceptance letter to a summer science program for minority students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, proclaimed, "My life is about to begin."

Now Suskind has turned the next few years of Cedric's story — a disappointing performance at MIT, where his hopes for university admission were dashed; a perilous senior year at Ballou, where his MIT humiliation nearly caused him to give up; his turnaround acceptance to Brown; and the grinding struggle to integrate himself, academically and socially, into that alien, ivied campus — into a book. When newspaper series are expanded into full-length nonfiction narratives, they often have a padded feel. *A Hope in the Unseen*, however, manages to enlarge the initial story not only by extending the narrative but by broadening its theme. Before, Suskind was telling the story of underclass barriers to success. Now, he's telling the story of affirmative action in the waning years of 20th-century America. The result deserves to win recognition as a classic of book-length narrative journalism.

A disclaimer: I worked for six years in the Washington bureau of *The Wall Street Journal*, where Suskind was a colleague and friend. (We've had almost no contact since I left the paper a little more than a year ago.) Perhaps this biases me in favor of *A Hope in the Unseen.* Those who have met Suskind, though, know him to be a cocky and ebullient soul — exactly the sort of person whose peers (including me) are loath to praise too highly, lest he become truly overbearing. In this case, however, there's no alternative, because the book is simply the best thing I've ever read about the confusing thicket of questions surrounding the preferential treatment of disadvantaged blacks.

That Cedric's path to the Ivy League was smoothed by special treatment is clear. He is not a pure, diamond-in-the-rough genius whose success, no matter what his environment, was guaranteed from birth. Such Einsteins have been known to exist from time to time, but obviously they're extremely rare, and their very freakishness guarantees that their stories wouldn't tell us much about the workings of

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American society. Cedric, Suskind makes plain, is quite smart, but his defining strength isn't intelligence but will. What's more, that will, while extraordinary, has been known to falter. In one of the book's more heartbreaking episodes, Cedric is tossed out of a magnet junior high school for becoming a minor discipline problem — mostly talking back disrespectfully to teachers — after a particularly painful visit with his father in prison. Cedric's expulsion means he won't be eligible to attend a magnet high school where college aspirations are the norm; instead, he's banished to the Ballou crab bucket.

At Ballou, Cedric regains his resolve, but his experience at MIT shows that it isn't enough to get him where he wants to go. Most of the kids in the minority program Cedric attends are from much wealthier backgrounds; their superior schools have left them much-better prepared for the program's academic rigors. The paradox, Suskind shows, is well known to the program's director, a retired black MIT graduate named Bill Ramsey. "When he first arrived, taking over a program that had been up and running for two decades, he had grand plans to find poor black and Hispanic kids from urban America — kids who had somehow learned math and science in what are all but war zones — and give them the boost," Suskind writes in one of the book's many interior monologues (all of them based on detailed interviews, he writes in an Author's Note). "Within his first year, he saw he'd been dreaming." Instead, Ramsey has redirected the program to benefit "polished middle- or upper-middle-class black and Hispanic kids — leaders of tomorrow, all — many of whom are here for little more than resumé padding." Cedric is one of the "few twisted apples, poor kids from bad schools," who Ramsey sneaks in from time to time, and his performance steadily improves throughout the summer program. But not fast enough; in the end, Cedric is told by a white professor, "I don't think you're MIT material." Dazed, Cedric walks back to his dorm room, closes his eyes, and yells, "RACIST!"

Suskind provides no insider reporting on Brown's decision to accept Cedric, but it's reasonable to suspect the admissions officers were weighing Cedric's triumph over adversity — which by then had been trumpeted in both the *Journal* and on ABC's "Nightline" — over his mediocre SAT scores. If not for his status as a nationally known inspirational figure, it's quite possible Cedric would have had to settle for a second-tier college. That would hardly have been a tragedy, but given Cedric's fierce pride — which Suskind doesn't flinch from portraying as occasionally annoying, even to teachers at Ballou who are trying to propel Cedric forward — he might never have been able to overcome the humiliation. (For Cedric, even settling for Brown after setting his sights on MIT was fairly difficult.)

In any case, Cedric was accepted to Brown, enabling Suskind to focus the last half of his book on the question: Does he belong? The answer eventually proves to be yes, but Cedric's struggles throughout his freshman year keep the outcome in doubt and enable Suskind to present a complex and wonderfully non-doctrinaire exploration of the question, largely from Cedric's point of view. In an arresting set-piece, Cedric is summoned for a visit with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who attempts to dispense useful advice while wrestling with his own demons. "I'm not sure if I would have selected an Ivy League school," Thomas says. "You're going to be up there with lots of very smart white kids, and if you're not sure about who you are you could get eaten alive."

In one of the book's more heartbreaking scenes, Cedric is tossed out of a magnet junior high school after a particularly painful visit with his father in prison.

On arriving at Brown, Cedric does indeed discover a whole world of unfamiliar cultural references that the other students have seemingly been swimming in since birth. In one especially poignant scene, Cedric sneaks a furtive look in the university bookstore at the jacket copy of a Winston Churchill biography so he can quickly master who that familiar-looking gentleman was; then it's on to the next anxiety. More striking than Cedric's academic challenges at Brown, which he eventually meets through hard work (and, Cedric would add, sustained religious faith) are Cedric's painful adjustments to the strange social terrain. Having been brought up in an environment where the smallest sexual dalliance or indulgence in

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alcohol or pot has consistently been shown to ruin lives, Cedric is amazed to observe that upper-middle-class white college students do these things all the time, in most instances suffering no discernible harm. Cedric's roomate, a white boy whose parents are doctors in Marblehead, Mass., appalls him with his untidiness. "Walking around in your bare feet," Cedric tells him. "That's disgusting." The roommate (whom Suskind calls Rob, bestowing one of a handful of pseudonyms used in the book) answers, "Cedric, everyone walks barefoot." The cultural gap between the two only widens with time, and by the end of the year the two are barely speaking. (Suskind writes in an epilogue that they patched it up the following year.)

Cedric forges a more successful friendship with another white boy, Zayd Osceola Ayers Dohrn, who shares Cedric's enthusiasm for cutting-edge urban music. Zayd turns out to be the son of Bernadine Dohrn and Bill Ayers, the Weather Underground fugitives-turned-Chicago-yuppies, whose chief (perhaps only) positive contribution to society, it seems, was raising an apparently bright, likeable, and empathetic child. Suskind portrays Dorhn, in particular, with gentle irony, and shows that even ex-radicals can make overbearing and embarrassing mothers. (At one point, she humiliates Zayd by using the word "fuck" in public on Parent's Weekend.) A minor quibble: To my taste, Suskind downplays Dohrn's and Ayers' monstrous past too much, portraying it merely as *outré*. Nowhere, for example, does he mention Dohrn's famous pronouncement about the Manson family: "Dig it. First they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the same room with them, then they even shoved a fork into a victim's stomach."

By the end of the book, Cedric is drifting into Brown's black clique, rejecting the warnings of Clarence Thomas ("Try to say to yourself, I'm not a black person, I'm just a person") and his own, somewhat less doctrinaire, aspirations to integrate himself into the wider culture. Although Suskind has painted a mildly disapproving picture of Brown's army of multiculturalism facilitators — who are shown constantly corralling students to discuss race and gender, and seem to ignore Cedric's tentative arguments against identity politics — it seems inevitable that Cedric will end up befriending more blacks than whites as he becomes more sure about who he is. By this time, in any case, the reader feels certain that Cedric has undergone a transformation that has carried him out of the ghetto forever — and that, despite whatever preferential treatment he's received, Cedric clearly belongs at Brown. Before you utter another word about affirmative action — favorable or not — please subject yourself to the pleasurable and edifying experience of reading this superb book.

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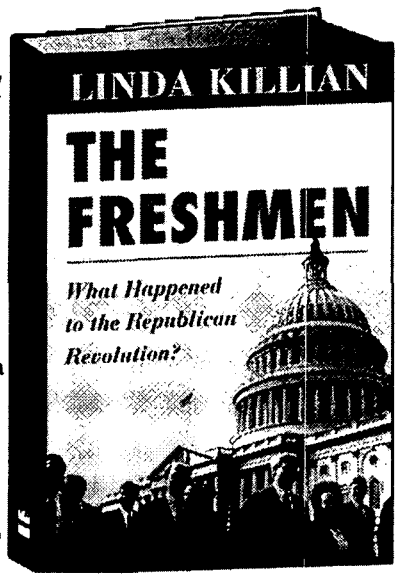

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Political Booknotes

The Great Divide

by Jonathan Alter

LAST YEAR, AS PART OF THE coverage of President Clinton's race initiative, I traveled to Hot Springs, Ark., to tape a story for "NBC Nightly News" on race relations in the president's hometown. I ended up disappointed in the story that aired. The only strong moment came when I asked a white woman how she would feel if her daughter came home with a black man to marry. She paused, sighed, and said evenly to the camera: "I'd pray." Beyond that, the story was far too superficial, even for television. The same has been true of various articles about race that I've written for *Newsweek* over the years. And I'm not alone. Journalists feel frustrated by the complexity of certain subjects, but especially this one. The deepest stories — the ones in the marrow of the nation — are always the hardest to convey.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER: A Story of Two Towns, a Death, and America's Dilemma
by Alex Kotlowitz
Doubleday, $24.95

But Alex Kotlowitz, author of the highly acclaimed *There Are No Children Here*, a wrenching account of the lives of two African-American boys in a Chicago housing project, is game to try again. This time his subject is the mysterious death of Eric McGinniss, a 16-year old black kid who was last seen alive in a white neighborhood and ended up drowning in a river between the towns of St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, Michigan.

By the standards of modern-day non-fiction thrillers, the new book is a failure. It doesn't give away too much to say that the resolution, the "payoff," leaves more than a little to be desired. In recent years, a number of similar books have been written as powerful narratives. The author usually novelizes the story as best he can with vivid characters and a tidy, satisfying ending. If certain players won't be interviewed, he writes around them. If facts are inconvenient, as they were in John Berendt's *In the Garden of Good and Evil*, he sometimes simply changes them.

Kotlowitz takes the more honest tack. Every writerly doubt, every failed lead, every source who stiffs him is grist for his layered tale of racial myth and countermyth. Although the book is disjointed and padded in parts, Kotlowitz succeeds in making his frustration in finding the truth about Eric's death serve as a metaphor for our larger frustrations about race. It's a dark photo montage of the American dilemma, vintage 1990s. The serious student of racial problems won't learn much, but *The Other Side of the River* is an evocative reminder of the essential messiness and emotional confusion of life in this country. Every crime, every conversation, ends up being just another game of blind-man-and-the-elephant.

The basic segregation facts are staggering. St. Joseph's, about two hours east of Chicago, is a prosperous town of 9,000, 95 percent white. The town went 25 years without a homicide. In "St. Johannesburg," as some blacks across the river call it, a police officer still talks about "coon hunting." Confederate flags are available. The progress in race relations is real, but stops short of profound. "There is in St. Joseph a tacit understanding that anything goes — working with blacks, golfing with blacks, drinking with blacks, even occasionally voting for blacks — but not bedding down with them," Kotlowitz writes. When an attractive county clerk dances with a black man at a party, she is teased and scorned as "Nicole," as in Nicole Brown Simpson. Most blacks simply steer clear of St. Joe's. "I pull up in parking lots and hear car door locks clicking. It gets to me," said one.

The feeling is mutual. The one place residents of St. Joe's avoid like the plague is the town directly across the river. Benton Harbor has a population of 12,000, 92 percent black. In 1994, it had the highest per capita murder rate in the U.S. with 21 homicides, triple the rate of Chicago and New York. Some whites call the place "Benton Harlem." "If you ain't bleeding," says one detective, "you ain't gonna make it on the list" of those who get police help.

We know from his earlier book that Kotlowitz has a rare ability to get black kids to talk honestly, and he uses it here. But he also understands the subtleties of black politics, which is much less monolithic than many whites imagine. At the same time, what unifies many blacks in Benton Harbor is a willingness to assume the worst about St. Joe's and the whites who live there. It goes without saying in Benton Harbor that Eric McGinniss was murdered, whatever the facts. The white St. Joe's police detective handling the case, Jim Reeves, was doomed from day one in Benton Harbor because of the color of his skin. While Kotlowitz bends over backward to be sensitive to the suspicions of the black community, it's impossible to escape the psychological projection at play. Eric's death, allegedly at the hands of whites, resonated for years longer than the black-on-black homicides that happen with stunning regularity.

Kotlowitz's reporting ranges across many compelling sub-themes, from racially charged school-board politics to the details of an autopsy on a drowning victim. But he returns, often lyrically, to this case as a totem of two towns. "Truth becomes myth; myth becomes truth. And your perspective — myth or truth, truth or myth — is shaped by which side of the river you live on," he writes. And finally: "To those in Benton Harbor, it is proof that race blinds their neighbors to the obvious. To those in Benton Harbor, it is proof that because of race even the obvious is never what it seems."

If Alex Kotlowitz wants to continue with this subject — and let's hope he does — perhaps his next book might offer a bit of navigational help for those who want to wade across the murky river, or build some bridges over it. Stories of those who succeed in closing racial gaps might not alleviate the

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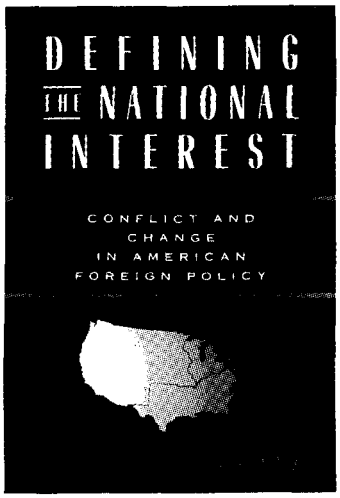

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bleakness of Kotlowitz's vision, but they could help him use his human touch to reach yet deeper into the heart of America.

JONATHAN ALTER, *a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly, *is a columnist for* Newsweek *and a contributing correspondent for "NBC News."*

Mutually Assured Denial

by William Saletan

ROE V. WADE TURNED 25 THIS year, and its anniversary passed in the usual manner. Once again, abortion activists staged rallies, vilified their opponents, and congratulated themselves on their heroism. And once again, average Americans stared at their television sets and wondered: Who are these people, and why are they so obsessed with this issue? That question beckoned *Washington Post* reporter Cynthia Gorney to Missouri nine years ago. Her answer, *Articles of Faith*, isn't a treatise or manifesto. It's a rich and beautifully told story, spanning three decades in the lives of Missouri's most influential abortion activists.

By focusing on a few activists and exploring their lives and personalities in detail, Gorney debunks or complicates various preconceptions about the abortion war. Neither side is as ideologically narrow as its opponents suppose. Yet each draws its moral confidence from a primordial denial of its adversary's truth. These dueling denials predate the abortion war, but have been greatly reinforced by it. They are the "articles of faith" that sustain the war and render it insoluble.

The Missouri combatants defy the usual stereotypes — that pro-choicers are irreligious, sexually permissive, or politically radical, and that pro-lifers are hostile to welfare, sex, birth control, and women's equality. In one passage, Gorney describes how three activists made their way to California: "On their drive west they slept in campgrounds and ate fruit and cheese from grocery stores, and when they reached San Francisco they laid out their sleeping bags on the apartment floor of a woman named Sunshine, who lived near the Zen Center, was married to a Buddhist taxi driver, and knew some of the sit-in protesters from the Trident missile demonstrations." Were the activists there to defend abortion rights? No, they were there to implore factory workers to stop making abortion suction machines.

The most troubling pattern Gorney reveals is the activists' inability to recognize, much less examine, their premises. Is the fetus a human being? Pro-lifers stand accused of failing to prove that it is. Gorney shows that their problem is more basic: They don't accept the question. They find the personhood of the fetus obvious — like the color of the sky, as one activist puts it — and assign the burden of proof to those who doubt it. Sam Lee, the most thoughtful of the pro-lifers featured in the book, is willing to entertain and refute alternative answers to the question of when life begins. But he's not willing, as his opponents are, to leave the question unanswered. Looking back over the career of another activist, Gorney wonders where he had learned that abortion was murder. The answer, she concludes, is: "Where had he *not* learned it?"

Hence the shock among pro-lifers when the Supreme Court declared in Roe that it "need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins" because philosophers, theologians, and medical experts couldn't agree on an answer. Many Catholics were unprepared to think of this as a question. "The humanity of the unborn baby — a phrase whose very vocabulary seemed to underscore its internal logic — had been relegated in a single morning to the status of opinion," Gorney writes. Hence, too, the naive assumption among pro-lifers that they could rally the nation against Roe simply by "explaining" what abortion and Roe entailed. And hence the bitterness and violence that ensued when the nation failed to rise up.

Confronted with questions about the personhood of the embryo, and with the competing claim that women are entitled to judge the morality of abortion for themselves, pro-lifers respond with dismissal and denial. Anti-abortion pioneers Jack and Barbara Willke, creators of a popular slide show depicting fetal development, pri-

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vately advise their comrades, "We will not show visuals under six weeks because we feel that if we do, the audience may change their minds from their conviction that this is human life." Pro-lifers constantly invoke the crude catch phrase "abortion on demand" to brush aside women's various reasons for ending their pregnancies. Even Supreme Court Justice Byron White, in his famous dissent from Roe, accuses his colleagues of sanctifying women's "convenience, whim, or caprice."

What has been less noticed, until now, is the corresponding schizophrenia of abortion rights advocates. Gorney cites several forums in which they have denied that abortion differs morally from contraception. When Susman, the pro-choice attorney, first encounters the proposition that the fetus is a person, he finds it legally incomprehensible. Two decades later, defending a St. Louis abortion clinic before the Supreme Court, he again dismisses this proposition as an "emotional label." For the clinic's medical staff, such denial requires greater effort. Michael Freiman, the clinic's senior physician, pays little attention to the fetuses he vacuums out, other than to notice that at a glance, they look "like something a doctor was supposed to take out." A nurse at the clinic confesses that during second-trimester abortions, she never looks at the extracted fetal parts. "If I looked," she explains, "I would never be able to work there again."

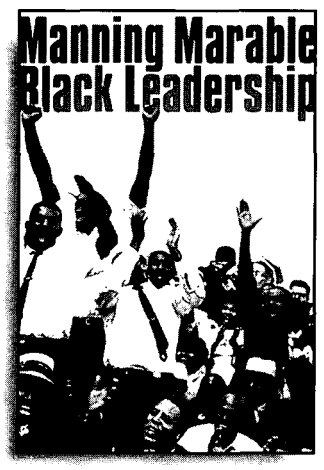
ARTICLES OF FAITH: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars
by Cynthia Gorney
Simon & Schuster, $27.50

How have abortion rights activists rationalized this denial? By countering the unreflective ideology of fetal humanity with the equally unreflective ideology of personal autonomy. This ideology of autonomy begins as a medical credo. Judy Widdicombe, the founder of the St. Louis clinic and the heroine of the book, figures that a nurse's job is to help each pregnant woman "have the baby or not have the baby," depending on which result the woman wants. Over time, this becomes a political credo. Abortion is "a woman's right," Betty Friedan declares in 1969, and "technicalities" such as the nature of the fetus are "irrelevant."

Against those who presume to bend women's wills to the law, pro-choicers resolve to bend the law to women's wills. Abortion laws were created by men and men's religions, they argue, and can just as easily be overthrown by women. Gorney explains how Freiman, like other doctors, turned against the abortion laws of the 1960s as he witnessed the gore, pain, and peril that women were willing to endure to end crisis pregnancies, by their own hands if necessary. After Roe, when pro-lifers propose to make abortion illegal again, Widdicombe reasons that this is folly because it won't "change women's minds." Now comes the tragic mistake. While bending the law to women's wills, abortion practitioners bend the facts as well. They sanitize the moral reality of abortion. Judy Widdicombe chastises pro-lifers for supposing that moral ambiguity "could be wished away by a simple act of will," yet she commits the same fallacy, by treating the fetus as a human life only when the woman wishes to see it that way. "Judy had been known to hold private procedure-room baptisms, when she thought a patient might be comforted by the ritual," Gorney writes. But if the woman doesn't want to see it that way, Widdicombe helps her deny the humanity of that same fetus. And when pro-lifers propose to require clinics to give women information about their fetuses, Widdicombe resolves to thwart this policy:

> Did the woman *want* information about the physical appearance of the fetus she was about to abort? Did she want to know it had "brain and heart function," or the "presence of external members?" ... [I]n an abortion clinic every patient had a right to denial, too: a right to refrain from asking, a right to shut her eyes, a right to select the vocabulary with which she was going to think about what she had decided to do.

Widdicombe even manages to fashion this denial into a positive ethic. A doctor, she suggests, has a duty to



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comfort his patient by concealing the moral and physical ugliness of the abortion. When Widdicombe tries to train Freiman in second-trimester abortions, he recoils in revulsion at a severed fetal arm, "suddenly thinking about Nazi Germany." He tells her he can't do the procedure, but she refuses to accept his refusal. "We're here for the *women*," she cries. "[W]e should be willing to endure the hardest part so they don't have to."

When Widdicombe becomes pregnant, she resorts to the same denial. She explains to Gorney that she and her husband "looked at what the quality of our life was like. It was good. And we decided," on that basis, to get an abortion. Afterward, says Gorney, Widdicombe mourned briefly, "[b]ut she never wavered when she talked about it. This was a decision we made: that was how she would describe her abortion." In this way, by defending her decision as an act, Widdicombe avoids having to defend its content. Indeed, this has been the rhetorical strategy of the whole abortion rights movement: to transform the issue from abortion to "choice," thereby competing with pro-lifers to control, as Gorney puts it, "the one-word distillation of the morally complex."

Ultimately, this determination to oversimplify makes pro-life and pro-choice activists oddly compatible. Each side finds the war exhilarating. Upon being hauled away from a clinic entrance in handcuffs, a pro-life demonstrator exults, "The first time you try to prevent [an abortion] is an experience you'll never forget."

In their zeal for the war, Gorney's chief protagonists lose touch with their humanity. Widdicombe's marriage collapses, and she weeps as she realizes that her personal life has become "withered and wrong," with "no person left over once the workday was finished, no real inside Judy at all." Lee becomes so preoccupied with saving babies that he quits his job without consulting his wife, who is at home taking care of his own baby. She asks him how they will pay the rent. "We don't have any *money*," she pleads later, in a panic. "How are we going to buy the *milk*?"

When Lee and Widdicombe are finally discarded by their colleagues, Widdicombe muses on the irony of their common fate. "All that solemnity, that blinding moral certainty, it must grow tiresome after a while," Gorney writes. "Zealots, Judy thought to herself with a small lurch of recognition: crusaders, martyrs, pigheaded people, we make useful leaders but exhausting colleagues, we *know* we can see what is right."

But Widdicombe has drawn the wrong lesson. She and Lee have been ousted from their movements, not for their zeal, but for tempering that zeal in heretical pursuit of political compromise. She has become disenchanted with pro-choice activists who find "exhilaration in the combat" and "don't know how to do anything else." Lee has soured on the "repellent" anger of Randall Terry, the "self-absorption" of pro-life purists, and the indecency of a pro-life lobby that expects him, as its full-time advocate, "to solicit donations in order to buy groceries for his family." Together, they have transcended the dogmas of their faiths. They, too, must now be denied.

WILLIAM SALETAN *is a columnist for* Slate *magazine.*

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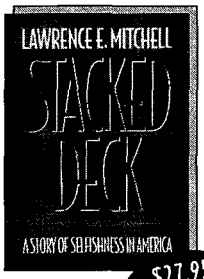

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The Lessons of Chechnya

by Thomas E. Ricks

TALKING ABOUT WHAT SORT OF wars the U.S. is likely to face in the coming decades, Gen. Charles Krulak, the commandant of the Marine Corps, likes to ask, "Are we going to have Son of Desert Storm or the Stepchild of Chechnya?" His answer: "I feel it will be Stepchild of Chechnya."

That grim prediction is one reason this journalistic history of the recent Chechen war has been attracting attention from the U.S. military even before being published in the U.S. (In fact, it was recommended to me by a smart Marine colonel who read the British edition that appeared last year.) If Gen. Krulak is correct and we face encounters like the Chechen War, the U.S. military is in for a rough time. One example: At one point in this book, a group of Chechen fighters moving through a dark sewer en route to an ambush run smack into a group of Russian commandos. "A furious gun battle lit up the pitch-black tunnel as half a dozen rifles opened up," sending bullets ricocheting along the walls and ceiling of the sewer.

As Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, the two young British reporters who co-authored this account, tell it, "The conflict in Chechnya started imperceptibly." Chechnya declared independence in 1991. Russia disputed that claim, but President Boris Yeltsin at first said there would be no military response, and in fact Russian troops were withdrawn from the area in 1992.

Then Moscow began supplying the pro-Russian opposition with arms. Escalating its involvement as it grew more exasperated with the breakaway republic, Russia in the fall of 1994 sent 40,000 troops to the Chechen border — a move that provoked the interesting charge from Jokhar Dudayev, the Soviet general turned president of Chechnya, that Moscow did indeed head "the evil empire."

President Yeltsin is the villain of this book. Seeking a quick resolution through intimidation, he sent a tank brigade and attack jets into the Chechen capital of Grozny in an ill-

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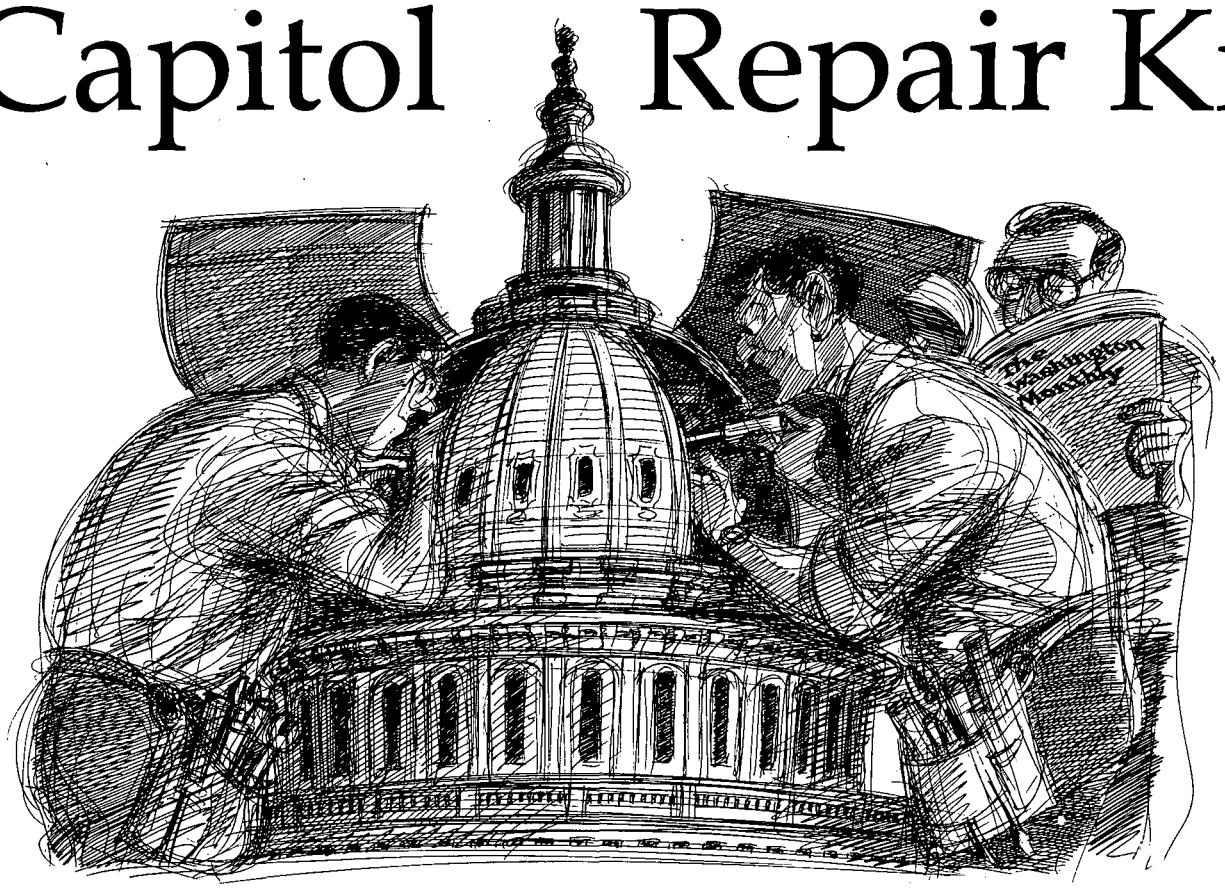

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considered show of force that actually permitted the Chechens to display their own guerrilla-like military prowess. By day the tank column was swarmed by civilian protesters; that night it was smashed by the rocket-propelled grenades of Chechen fighters. It was spirit, not numbers, that counted: The authors estimate that at first the Chechens were able to counter the 40,000-strong Russian invasion force with only about 1,000 fighters. Purposely permitted by the Chechens to penetrate to the center of the city, the Russian Maikop Brigade was first surrounded and then destroyed.

CHECHNYA: Calamity in the Caucasus
by Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal
New York University Press, $26.95

Russia responded ferociously. The authors claim that at one point, Grozny was hit with the heaviest artillery bombardment since World War II, which seems an overstatement in light of the firepower used in the Iran-Iraq War. Three months later, the Russians took Grozny. According to the authors, 27,000 civilians were killed in the process, many of them ethnic Russians who, unlike the Chechens, had no relatives in outlying villages to whom they could flee.

Moving the war southward into the mountains of the Chechen countryside, Russian forces committed a variety of atrocities, from burning villages to terrorizing prisoners by throwing them from hovering helicopters. The Chechens sometimes were equally vicious. Even so, to the Russians the war seemed all but won.

Backs to the wall, the Chechens responded in mid-1995 with what is generally called terrorism, but what contemporary military theorists analyze as an "asymmetrical response": They drove north into a Russian town and took hostage some 1,200 people in a hospital, spectacularly humiliating a Russian government that thought it had resolved the Chechen problem. Months later Chechen fighters roared back out of their mountain retreats. In August 1996 they recaptured the remains of Grozny from 12,000 undertrained and demoralized Russian troops. A Russian sergeant told the authors, "The (Chechen) fighters aren't scared to move around and we are, that is the difference. They are the bosses here." By the end of the month, Moscow had agreed to recognize Chechen independence, and Russian troops again withdrew.

This book should be read as a companion to the recent *Philadelphia Inquirer* series on the U.S. Army's disastrous firefight in Somalia in October 1993. Both works should be required as cautionary reading for policymakers and pundits prone to underestimating the difficulty of intervening in the cities of the Third World, whether Baghdad, Mogadishu, or Grozny. The two studies also should prove instructive to anyone who thinks future wars will be high-tech, low-sweat affairs.

THOMAS E. RICKS, *The Wall Street Journal's Pentagon correspondent, is the author of* Making the Corps.

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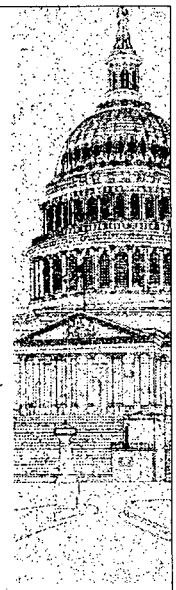

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Programmed to Fail

by Thomas Toch

THE LONGER AMERICAN KIDS stay in school, the further they fall behind their counterparts in other industrialized countries. That's the troubling finding of a big international study of students' math and science skills conducted over the past couple of years. U.S. fourth-graders end up near the top of the global pile in science and above average in math; eighth-graders are slightly above average in science and below average in math; 12th-graders outperform only Cyprus and South Africa among 21 nations in a test of general math and science knowledge. The 12th-grade results, released only a few weeks ago to front-page coverage in the major dailies, explode the conventional wisdom that our top students are as good as those of our economic competitors: U.S. kids ended up tied for last on a special test of physics and advanced math. To add insult to injury, Asian nations, whose students routinely turn

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in world-beating performances in math and science, sat out the 12th-grade study.

Not surprisingly, pundits have taken to their hobby horses in the wake of these results, venting their pet peeves with the educational system and trumpeting favorite reform nostrums. But the simplest and most important lesson to be drawn from the Third International Math and Science Study is that expectations are a lot lower and the curricula much less rigorous in U.S. secondary schools than in those of other industrialized nations. Virtually all students in other developed countries take algebra by the eighth grade, for example, while only a quarter of U.S. students do so. Ross Perot was right when, as head of a Texas school reform commission in the 1980s, he railed against 12-coach football teams and electric cleat cleaners, deriding high schools in America as "places dedicated to play."

At one time, the U.S. could tolerate a small role for subjects like French and physics in many high schools because we had an industrial economy that required most workers to use their hands rather than their heads. But in the modern knowledge-based economy workers increasingly need the sort of rigorous education that was once largely reserved for the gifted and the privileged. That's the thesis underlying the school reform movement of the past 15 years, and it's the core belief of the new book *Standards for Our Schools*, by Marc Tucker and Judy Codding.

Tucker arguably has been the most influential school reformer in the nation over the past decade and a half, though he has received far less recognition than such peers as Theodore Sizer, Ernest Boyer, and Albert Shanker. Many of the most significant reforms now in place in U.S. schools can be traced to his writings, from the breaking of the vice grip of public-education bureaucracies through "site-based management" of schools, to the linking of teacher pay to performance through a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the establishment of national curriculum standards and tests, both of which he has drafted through his non-profit National Center for Education and the Economy and affiliated organizations.

In contrast to many in the school reform world, Tucker has both a capacity for the fine grain of individual reforms and a big-picture sense of how the many parts of an educational system fit together. Just as importantly, he has the coalition-building instincts of a politician: He has raised millions of dollars of public and private monies to fund major reform projects that involve not only thousands of teachers but also dozens of governors.

This book is a blueprint for the changes in the educational system that Tucker believes are needed to achieve his holy grail of high expectations for all students. He and Codding, a former high school principal, leave no part of the system unexamined: Abandon middle schools, they urge, and replace them with more personal elementary schools that run through the eighth grade; replace elementary generalist teachers with science teachers and other specialists; give financial incentives to schools that raise student achievement; supplement textbooks with paperback "concept books" that explain the key ideas in every core course; narrow the mission of high schools to rigorous instruction in core subjects, leaving vocational education and other work of traditional "comprehensive high schools" to other institutions. Such ideas and others in the book are sound, if not always original to Tucker.

STANDARDS FOR OUR SCHOOLS
How to Set Them, Measure Them, and Reach Them
Marc Tucker and Judy Codding
Simon & Schuster, $25

The linchpin of school improvement, Tucker argues, is national standards. "Countries where achievement is high have clear national standards," he writes, "and all the links in the chain are tied to the standards." Tough universal standards are particularly important in the U.S., he points out, because many local educators — in sharp contrast to their counterparts in Asia — believe that natural talent rather than hard work is the defining factor in student achievement. Tucker also argues, persuasively, that many educators won't buy into tough standards unless the standards are backed up by tests that have consequences for both students and their teachers. He therefore proposes giving schools financial and other rewards for lifting scores on tests based on such standards.

Not surprisingly, Tucker takes pains to promote his own organization's new standards and tests. The president's proposed national tests in reading and math are a good but flawed idea, Tucker argues, because they don't peg test questions to a specific set of achievement standards. Not that it matters. Students are unlikely ever to take the Clinton tests, since the plan has been quashed in Congress by an improbable coalition of conservative Republicans bent on defending "local control" in education and liberal Democrats who worry that higher standards would slow the advancement of minorities.

The reality, of course, is that local control and high standards have proven to be mutually exclusive in most American communities, and the notion that higher expectations would leave minority students less well off educationally simply isn't compelling. The average African-American 12th-grader reads at the level of the average white eighth-grader, and 40 percent of Hispanic students drop out of school. They have nowhere to go but up.

The good news is that moderates in both parties are embracing the idea of tougher standards linked to tougher tests. A meeting of governors and CEO's convened by Gov. Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin and IBM's Lou Gerstner two years ago has resulted in the creation of an organization that's helping to introduce new standards in the states. And a few states, notably New York and Maryland, are phasing in tough end-of-course high school exams that should make a difference. These steps are remarkable in a nation where the mention of centralized standards and tests would have been heresy only a decade ago. But it remains to be seen whether the political center will prevail against both the left and the right on the standards issue. If not, it's unlikely that the rankings of U.S. students in international studies will budge.

THOMAS TOCH *is a senior writer at* U.S. News & World Report.

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Arianna's World

by Mickey Kaus

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON IS A SOCial climber who married oil heir Michael Huffington, insinuated herself into the inner circles of the national Republican party, and then got divorced from her husband after he lost his bid to become a U.S. senator from California. One would like to believe she is deeply evil. Unfortunately, she is also charming and witty (at least if you don't work for her) and seems to genuinely care about political ideas. That, and her willingness to trash fellow Republicans, has increased her value as a member of the pundito-entertainment complex even as her serious political ambitions grow evermore unrealistic.

Greetings From the Lincoln Bedroom must have seemed like a good idea: a satirical Lewis Carrollish fantasy in which the droll, idealistic Arianna spends a harrowing weekend in the through-the-looking-glass world of the Clinton White House. But just as the galleys went out to reviewers, the Lewinsky scandal broke. With impressive speed, Huffington has turned out a revised Monicafied version, heavily overloaded with lame oral sex jokes, but at least not totally obsolete.

Judging from the acknowledgments, Huffington had a lot of help, though one of those she thanks, her friend Harry Shearer, can't have had that much to do with this project. If he had, it would have been a lot funnier. Nothing in *Lincoln Bedroom* is as good as Shearer's imaginary visions of Clinton and Gingrich on his weekly public radio program "Le Show." Huffington's purpose is too didactic: basically to show that everyone in Washington is mired in a sea of corruption and hollow compromise — everyone, that is, except humble little Arianna/Alice, who (as the book's setup would have it) arrives for her White House weekend after losing a bet and contributing $300 to the Democratic National Committee. She goes to a séance with the Red Queen (Hillary), meets a hideous two-faced creature called The Bipartisan, attends various shakedowns with corporate donors, and worries about a "late-night visit from the Fondler-in-Chief." The main voices of wisdom she encounters are Socks (who talks) and, yes, an ancient black servant named Walter, who says things like, "You don't want nothing to do with them Bipartisans, Mrs. Huffington."

GREETINGS FROM THE LINCOLN BEDROOM
Arianna Huffington
Crown Publishers, $23

The book ends with a nauseating sitcom-like moment of sanctimony when poor Arianna is chased back to her room by a horrifying mob only to be rescued by (yes, again!) the ghost of Abraham Lincoln, who delivers a lecture on the real meaning of leadership. (Hint: it's not just following the polls!) In between there are lots of semen-stained dresses, kneepads, and, oddly, urine jokes. I admit I laughed out loud once, but only once — I don't want to say at what. There is a weak Maya Angelou parody, a "Contract with Corporate America" that reads like an out-take from *The Nation*, and a brave attempt to find double-entendres in Clinton's recent State of the Union address, even though rotating teams of White House speechwriters combed Clinton's text to remove virtually every possible unwanted laugh. It also takes some gall for the just-divorced Huffington, a sometime follower of guru John-Roger, to ask whether Bill and Hillary are "really married" and to make fun of the president for consorting with "self-esteem counselors! recovered-memory channelers! licensed astrologers!"

Which isn't to say Huffington has lost all her charm. There's a good bit with a statue-like Al Gore stashed in a catacomb-like Great Hall of the Vice-Presidents. Socks is an appealing, fully developed character, and the meeting with the monstrous Bipartisan has a genuine Carroll-like quality. ("The Bipartisan smiled and frowned at the same time.") Huffington's Sam Donaldson yells "Hold on, Mr. President," after a news conference, and then when the president actually stops to answer, doesn't have a question. ("No president ever held on before, sir. I'm sorry. I'll go now.") There may even be a profound insight in the political pointers Huff-

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Clash Between Hindus and Muslims Leave 22 Dead In Bombay

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Once upon a time in the ancient city of Jerusalem, three sons were born: one a Jew, one a Christian and one a Moslem. The old woman in charge of the nursery could not see well and, alas, the three babies were mixed up.

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So it came to pass that when the three boys grew to manhood, there was bad blood and much hate among Jew, Christian and Moslem, so that the Jew raised as a Moslem slew the Moslem of Christian birth. The Christian, son of Islam, put to sword the Jew born of Christ Birth, and the Moslem, sired by a Jew, strangled the Christian born of Islam.

In the name of all merciful God-Allah-Jehovah—amid great misery and loud lament—the land was drenched with blood.

Moral: Life without religion is better, much better.

—Nicholas Stephen Poluhoff

RABBI KNIFED IN WAVE OF ANTI-JEWISH ATTACKS

Religious riots kill three more

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ington has Clinton give Gingrich: "You make America feel bad about being selfish; I make America feel good about being selfish. That's my secret."

Huffington mocks Clinton, but she really seems to despise Gingrich, who is portrayed as an obese, unprincipled egomaniac. Her substantive complaint is that neither party cares about "what's happening to the poorest Americans." But the Alice-in-Wonderland format lets Alice/Arianna win all the imaginary arguments without ever having to defend her own proposed nostrums, which appear to be a "charitable tax credit" and "school choice for inner-city kids." Didn't Gingrich and Clinton transform welfare, so far successfully? At least when former Labor Secretary Robert Reich wrote a picaresque novel in which he was always the hero, it had some clear correspondence to his actual political battles.

What Huffington left out is also interesting. As a columnist, she has heavily promoted the unproven rumor that Clinton had an affair with Shelia Lawrence, wife of hotelier Larry Lawrence, whose body had to be exhumed from Arlington Cemetery when it was discovered he'd fabricated a heroic Merchant Marine record. At two places in the final galleys of *Lincoln Bedroom*, however, Huffington has crossed Shelia Lawrence's name off the list of Clinton paramours and substituted the names "Monica Lewinsky" and "Kathleen Willey." Who says American libel laws have no teeth!

MICKEY KAUS *writes the "Chatterbox" column for* Slate *magazine.*

Media Cynics

by Matthew Cooper

FIRST, THE CAVEATS. I COVERED the White House full time from 1993 to 1996 and I'm friendly with many of the people in this book, including the author. My wife, who used to work for the Clintons, gets a couple of mentions in here. And I get a pat on the back for a scandal scooplet — getting the White House to reveal that it had long known about Dick Morris' second mistress, the one with whom he had a child. So mine isn't, in the traditional book-review sense, an objective view.

That said, this is a solid read buttressed by a terrific amount of reporting. Kurtz has delved deeply into White House-press relations in the Clinton era. And while the title of the book focuses on the administration side of the equation, Kurtz scrutinizes both sides of the podium. There's the White House, obsessed with controlling the story and containing the damage from the latest scandal. And then there's the press corps — afraid always of getting scooped on the latest scandal. As is true of almost any issue that one explores in depth, it's a complicated story. There are no villains and no saints.

Take Mike McCurry. He's got qualities that make him an ideal press secretary. He's well informed; he fights for the press within the administration. It was McCurry who lobbied for reporters to spend more time with Clinton in small, off-the-record sessions — something that Clinton had resisted and continues somewhat inexplicably to believe, despite his considerable charms, is a waste of his time. (Having been in some of those, I think they're good for all sides.) Still, even a straight shooter like McCurry can wander into the gray zone. At one briefing, he fails to mention what he knows to be true — that he had personally coached Texas oilman Truman Arnold on how to respond to press inquiries about whether Arnold had been personally solicited by the president. It's not quite a lie, but it's pretty close. It seems like a small matter but it's a telling instance of the administration's larger difficulties with the truth. Just look at the Al Gore imbroglio. First, the veep only remembered making a few fundraising calls. Oops. Then it turned out to be 46 calls. First they were just for the DNC. Shucks. Then it turned out to be for the Clinton-Gore re-election campaign as well — an important legal distinction. On the Buddhist temple affair, only under duress did Gore aides come up with the slippery phrase that it was a "finance-related event" — which, as my colleague Walter Shapiro jokes, is like calling a stick-up a wallet-and-watch related event. It's true, as the White House argues, that the truth is not something you can easily release to the press. The papers aren't always easy to find, the memories of individual actors sometimes conflict. And yet, the administration still has a propensity to be a little too cute.

SPIN CYCLE:
Inside the Clinton Propaganda Machine
by Howard Kurtz
Free Press, $25

For all the White House woes, the press, I think, actually comes off looking worse here. It lurches constantly from scandal to scandal, treating each new revelation as if it's earth shattering. And yet the cumulative effect of the FBI files, Johnny Chung, the coffees, Charlie Trie, the Webb Hubbell affair, Larry Lawrence's Arlington burial, the Gore fundraising calls, and so on is slightly ludicrous. The press never sorts out what's important from what's merely new. No wonder the public has tuned out the scandal and is willing to give Clinton a pass — at least for now — on the Monica Lewinsky matter. When everything is a scandal, nothing is.

What's especially disheartening is the abject cynicism of the press. Each new Clinton initiative — meat inspection, child care, even reaching a balanced budget — is viewed through a political prism of who won and who lost. It's not that the press should treat Clinton's proposals with reflexive acceptance. But the idea of exploring whether a program would actually work or not is beyond the ken of the White House press corps. Interestingly, as Kurtz points out, the American people know better. Mark Penn, the president's elusive pollster, found that huge majorities of the American public knew about his proposals for meat inspection, controlling tobacco, and other issues. Even if the press treated each new announcement with knee-jerk disdain, Clinton was engaged in "a second conversation" with the public. Is that a triumph of propaganda? Cynics might say so. I tend to think it's the people making a judgment about the quality of their lives and the quality of their leaders' policies.

MATTHEW COOPER, *a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly, *is a national correspondent for* Newsweek.

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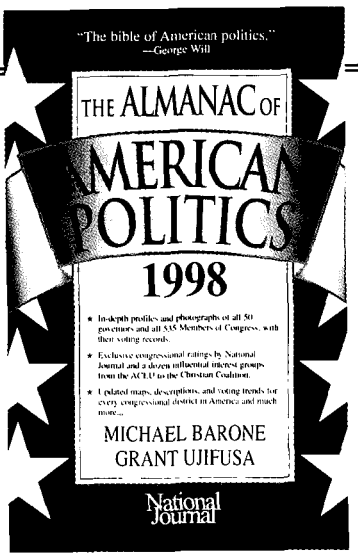

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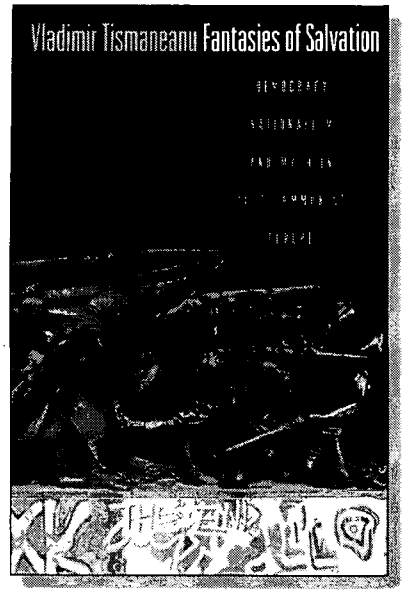

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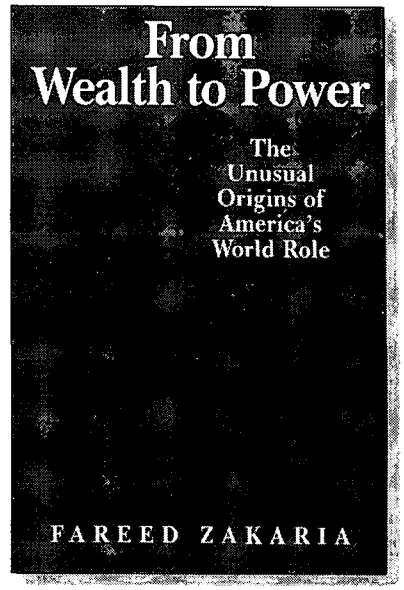

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